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SCIENCE FICTION

DECEMBER 1954
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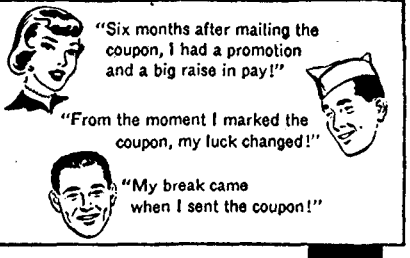
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DECEMBER, 1954 VOL. 9, NO. 3

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!

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Cover by EMSH Wishing SEASON'S GREETINGS TO OUR READERS!

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy.

Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to: Scribe K.E.H.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

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ALL BUT THE SQUEAL

EDITING GALAXY has some rich rewards—copping all the International Fantasy Awards for 1954, for instance, and, in the four years since its birth, finding it has become the most widely read science fiction magazine in the world.

On the other hand, getting the 130 or so stories we present every year means slogging wearily through thousands of manuscripts, eyes bloodshot, but hopes high that, somewhere in this mountain, there will be the rare gems that make the hunt worth while.

They're there, of course, as you see each month, for we make it our business to discover new talent.

Speaking of business, however, any really efficient one makes full use of its by-products. We're losing out on that score. Remember how kerosene refineries poured away gasoline, gold mines dumped uranium and platinum, and slaughterers threw out glands along with liver and lights—all because no use was known for these now valuable items?

I hate to confess it, but we're doing the same wasteful thing. Let's see if we can't do a properly efficient job by closely examining the main categories and possibly finding a use for them. It shouldn't be too hard; after all, we have our trained imaginations.

- Here's the plot in which the hero and heroine turn out to be Adam and Eve.
- Ah, yes, the scientist who manufactures a miniature universe in the lab and discovers life on a planet that is circling a tiny sun. His name, we learn, is Yah Veh.
- The spaceship crew that comes upon an absolutely ideal world, where the inhabitants don't know violence of any sort . . . and then leave hastily because, it seems, Man brings hatred and greed wherever he goes. Our boys hate to take off, naturally, but if they stay, they will inflict madness on the innocent natives.
- The dictator-ridden society in which—you can fill it out from there. Everybody is downtrodden and miserable. Our hero, generally with the aid of a sidekick and/or maiden, kicks over the entire society with a flick of the wrist-radio. Oddly, in spite of having been conditioned to their civilization from birth, the inhabitants all react exactly as if they had been raised in ours.
- This is a sub-division of the plot immediately above—a girl in a parthenogenetic society risks

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the death penalty because she obstinately insists on having a baby in the old-fashioned way. Does that sound reasonable? For one thing, any society inevitably creates attitudes; Huxley's *Brave New World* gave one solution—"mother" became a word to snigger over. And how many women demand the right to beat their laundry on river stones instead of using soul-destroying washing machines?

• Let's not overlook the post-atomic mutation story in which kids are destroyed because, being freaks, they have only ten fingers and toes.

• Oh, and there's the yarn about the spectacularly advanced extraterrestrial race that very benevolently keeps us from having space flight until we are worthy of it. Seems we'll spread greed and hatred wherever we go. (Remember the innocent race that went mad when our crew landed on their world.)

• Another sub-division—aliens, no less spectacularly advanced, have seen our A-bomb blasts, know we'll have H-bombs and worse before long, will inexorably blow up our mudball . . . and in some way disrupt the fabric of the Universe, endangering people thousands of light-years away. I guess this makes sense, since so many writers have done the story, but why are bomb blasts more dangerous to this mystical fabric of the Universe than novas?

• The super-computer that, given the problem of how to bring peace to the world, goes insane because it has no answer. That's downright silly. Go into any bar and you'll get more answers than you'll know what to do with.

There are many others, but these ought to do as a starter. Can't do everything at once, you know. Rome wasn't built in a day, according to recent news dispatches, and our industries in many cases took years to learn how to use by-products, which, in case you've forgotten, was the purpose behind all this.

As I mentioned, putting out GALAXY is rewarding, but it's hardly a cinch. These and similar stories, though, come in so relentlessly that we could publish *Greed & Hatred Science Fiction, Tales of Jehovah, Dictator Stories, Adams & Eves, Mother's Space Journal* and so on weekly.

There's only one hitch:

Enough writers turn out these things to support a magazine in each category, but would they be willing to read each other's versions?

No, I guess not.

There probably is no use whatever for this literary sludge. It's a shame—there's so much of it.

—H. L. GOLD

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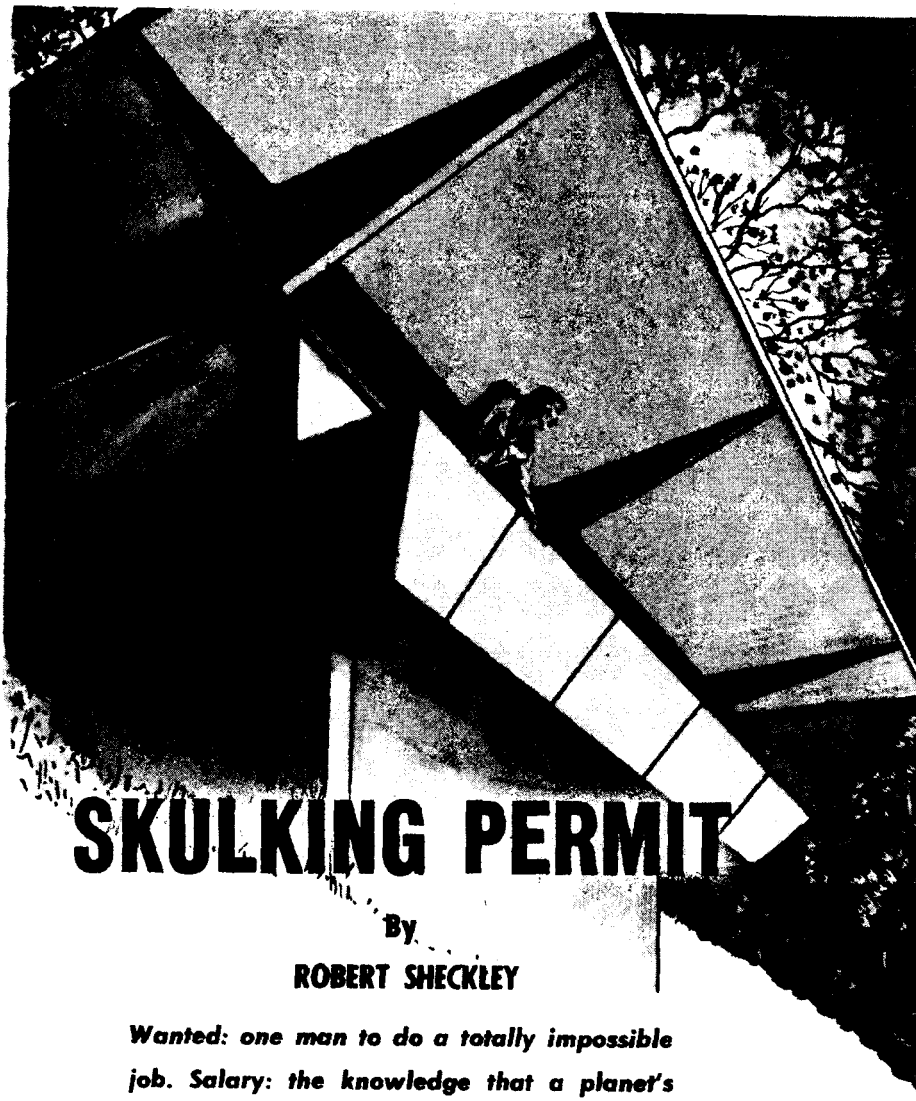

SKULKING PERMIT

By
ROBERT SHECKLEY

Wanted: one man to do a totally impossible job. Salary: the knowledge that a planet's life depends upon his being able to do it!

Illustrated by MEL HUNTER

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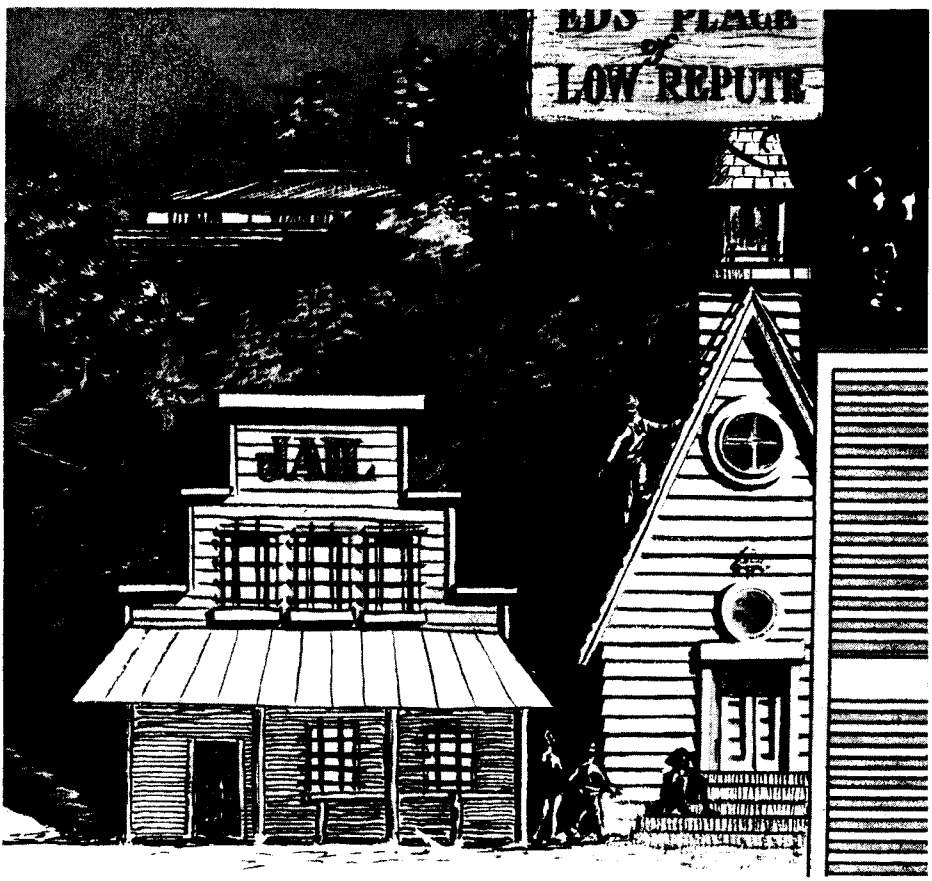
TOM Fisher had no idea he was about to begin a criminal career. It was morning. The big red sun was just above the horizon, trailing its small yellow companion. The village, tiny and precise, a unique white dot on the planet's green expanse, glistened under its two midsummer suns.

Tom was just waking up inside his cottage. He was a tall, tanned young man, with his father's oval eyes and his mother's easygoing attitude toward exertion. He was in no hurry; there could be no fishing until the fall rains, and therefore no real work for a Fisher. Until fall, he was going to loaf and mend his fishing poles.

"It's supposed to have a red roof!" he heard Billy Painter



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shouting outside.

"Churches *never* have red roofs!" Ed Weaver shouted back.

Tom frowned. Not being involved, he had forgotten the changes that had come over the village in the last two weeks. He slipped on a pair of pants and sauntered out to the village square.

The first thing he saw when he entered the square was a large new sign, reading: NO ALIENS ALLOWED WITHIN CITY LIMITS. There were no aliens on the entire planet of New Delaware. There was nothing but forest, and this one village. The sign was purely a statement of policy.

The square itself contained a Church, a Jail and a Post Office, all constructed in the last two frantic weeks and set in a neat row facing the market. No one knew what to do with these buildings; the village had gone along nicely without them for over two hundred years. But now, of course, they had to be built.

ED Weaver was standing in front of the new Church, squinting upward. Billy Painter was balanced precariously on the Church's steep roof, his blond mustache bristling indignantly. A small crowd had gathered.

"Damn it, man," Billy Painter was saying, "I tell you I was reading about it just last week. White roof, okay. Red roof, never."

"You're mixing it up with something else," Weaver said. "How about it, Tom?"

Tom shrugged, having no opinion to offer. Just then, the Mayor bustled up, perspiring freely, his shirt flapping over his large paunch.

"Come down," he called to Billy. "I just looked it up. It's the Little Red *Schoolhouse,* not Churchhouse."

Billy looked angry. He had always been moody; all Painters were. But since the Mayor made him Chief of Police last week, he had become downright temperamental.

"We don't have no Little Schoolhouse," Billy argued, halfway down the ladder.

"We'll just have to build one," the Mayor said. "We'll have to hurry, too." He glanced at the sky. Involuntarily, everyone in the crowd glanced upward. But there was still nothing in sight.

"Where are the Carpenter boys?" the Mayor asked. "Sid, Sam, Marv—where are you?"

Sid Carpenter's head appeared through the crowd. He was still on crutches from last month when he had fallen out of a tree looking for threstle's eggs; no Carpenter was worth a damn at tree-climbing.

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"The other boys are at Ed Beer's Tavern," Sid said.

"Where else would they be?" Mary Waterman called from the crowd.

"Well, you gather them up," the Mayor said. "They gotta build us a Little Schoolhouse, and quick. Tell them to put it up beside the Jail." He turned to Billy Painter, who was back on the ground. "Billy, you paint that Schoolhouse a good bright red, inside and out. It's very important."

"When do I get a Police Chief badge?" Billy demanded. "I read that Police Chiefs always get badges."

"Make yourself one," the Mayor said. He mopped his face with his shirt-tail. "Sure hot. Don't know why that Inspector couldn't have come in winter . . . Tom! Tom Fisher! Got an important job for you. Come on, I'll tell you all about it."

He put an arm around Tom's shoulders and they walked to the Mayor's cottage past the empty market, along the village's single paved road. In the old days, that road had been of packed dirt. But the old days had ended two weeks ago and now the road was paved with crushed rock. It made barefoot walking so uncomfortable that the villagers simply cut across each other's lawns. The Mayor, though, walked on it out of principle.

"Now look, Mayor," Tom protested, "I'm on my vacation—"

"Can't have any vacations now," the Mayor said. "Not *now*. He's due any day." He ushered Tom inside his cottage and sat down in the big armchair, which had been pushed as close to the Interstellar Radio as possible.

"Tom," the Mayor said directly, "how would you like to be a criminal?"

"I don't know," said Tom. "What's a Criminal?"

SQUIRMING uncomfortably in his chair, the Mayor rested a hand on the Radio for authority. "It's this way," he said, and began to explain.

Tom listened, but the more he heard, the less he liked. It was all the fault of that Interstellar Radio, he decided. Why hadn't it really been broken?

No one had believed it could work. It had gathered dust in the office of one Mayor after another, for generations, the last silent link with Mother Earth. Two hundred years ago, Earth talked with New Delaware, and with Ford IV, Alpha Centauri, Nueva España, and the other colonies that made up the United Democracies of Earth. Then all conversations stopped.

There seemed to be a war on Earth. New Delaware, with its

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one village, was too small and too distant to take part. They waited for news, but no news came. And then plague struck the village, wiping out three-quarters of the inhabitants.

Slowly the village healed. The villagers adopted their own ways of doing things. They forgot Earth.

Two hundred years passed.

And then, two weeks ago, the ancient Radio had coughed itself into life. For hours, it growled and spat static, while the inhabitants of the village gathered around the Mayor's cottage.

Finally words came out: ". . . hear me, New Delaware? Do you hear me?"

"Yes, yes, we hear you," the Mayor said.

"The colony is still there?"

"It certainly is," the Mayor said proudly.

The voice became stern and official. "There has been no contact with the Outer Colonies for some time, due to unsettled conditions here. But that's over, except for a little mopping up. You of New Delaware are still a colony of Imperial Earth and subject to her laws. Do you acknowledge the status?"

The Mayor hesitated. All the books referred to Earth as the United Democracies. Well, in two centuries, names could change.

"We are still loyal to Earth," the Mayor said with dignity.

"Excellent. That saves us the trouble of sending an expeditionary force. A Resident Inspector will be dispatched to you from the nearest point, to ascertain whether you conform to the customs, institutions and traditions of Earth."

"What?" the Mayor asked, worried.

THE stern voice became higher-pitched. "You realize, of course, that there is room for only one intelligent species in the Universe—Man! All others must be suppressed, wiped out, annihilated. We can tolerate no aliens sneaking around us. I'm sure you understand, General."

"I'm not a General. I'm a Mayor."

"You're in charge, aren't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then you are a General. Permit me to continue. In this galaxy, there is no room for aliens. None! Nor is there room for deviant human cultures, which, by definition, are alien. It is impossible to administer an empire when everyone does as he pleases. There must be order, *no matter what the cost.*"

The Mayor gulped hard and stared at the radio.

"Be sure you're running an Earth colony, General, with no radical departures from the norm,

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such as free will, free love, free elections, or anything else on the proscribed list. Those things are *alien,* and we're pretty rough on aliens. Get your colony in order, General. The Inspector will call in about two weeks. That is all."

The village held an immediate meeting, to determine how best to conform with the Earth mandate. All they could do was hastily model themselves upon the Earth pattern as shown in their ancient books.

"I don't see why there has to be a Criminal," Tom said.

"That's a very important part of Earth society," the Mayor explained. "All the books agree on it. The Criminal is as important as the Postman, say, or the Police Chief. Unlike them, the Criminal is engaged in anti-social work. He works *against* society, Tom. If you don't have people working *against* society, how can you have people working *for* it? There'd be no jobs for them to do."

Tom shook his head. "I just don't see it."

"Be reasonable, Tom. We have to have Earthly things. Like Paved Roads. All the books mention that. And Churches, and Schoolhouses, and Jails. And all the books mention Crime."

"I won't do it," Tom said.

"Put yourself in my position," the Mayor begged. "This Inspector comes and meets Billy Painter, our Police Chief. He asks to see the jail. Then he says, 'No Prisoners?' I answer, 'Of course not. We don't have any Crime here.' 'No Crime?' he says. 'But Earth colonies always have Crime. You know that.' 'We don't,' I answer. 'Didn't even know what it was until we looked up the word last week.' 'Then why did you build a Jail?' he asks me. 'Why did you appoint a Police Chief?' "

THE Mayor paused for breath. "You see? The whole thing falls through. He sees at once that we're not truly Earthlike. We're faking it. We're *aliens!*"

"Hmm," Tom said, impressed in spite of himself.

"This way," the Mayor went on quickly, "I can say, 'Certainly we've got Crime here, just like on Earth. We've got a combination Thief and Murderer. Poor fellow had a bad upbringing and he's maladjusted. Our Police Chief has some clues, though. We expect an arrest within 24 hours. We'll lock him in the Jail, then Rehabilitate him."

"What's Rehabilitate?" Tom asked.

"I'm not sure. I'll worry about that when I come to it. But now do you see how necessary crime is?"

"I suppose so. But why me?"

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"Can't spare anyone else. And you've got narrow eyes. Criminals always have narrow eyes."

"They aren't *that* narrow. They're no narrower than Ed Weaver's—"

"Tom, please," the Mayor said. "We're all doing our part. You want to help, don't you?"

"I suppose so," Tom repeated wearily.

"Fine. You're our Criminal. Here, this makes it legal."

He handed Tom a document. It read: SKULKING PERMIT. *Know all Men by these Presents that Tom Fisher is a Duly Authorized Thief and Murderer. He is hereby required to Skulk in Dismal Alleys, Haunt Places of Low Repute, and Break the Law.*

Tom read it through twice, then asked, "What Law?"

"I'll let you know as fast as I make them up," the Mayor said. "All Earth colonies have Laws."

"But what do I *do*?"

"You Steal. And Kill. That should be easy enough." The Mayor walked to his bookcase and took down ancient volumes entitled *The Criminal and his Environment, Psychology of the Slayer,* and *Studies in Theft Motivation.*

"These'll give you everything you need to know. Steal as much as you like. One Murder should be enough, though. No sense overdoing it."

"Right," Tom nodded. "I guess I'll catch on."

He picked up the books and returned to his cottage.

IT WAS very hot and all the talk about Crime had puzzled and wearied him. He lay down on his bed and began to go through the ancient books.

There was a knock on his door.

"Come in," Tom called, rubbing his tired eyes.

Marv Carpenter, oldest and tallest of the red-headed Carpenter boys, came in, followed by old Jed Farmer. They were carrying a small sack.

"You the town Criminal, Tom?" Marv asked.

"Looks like it."

"Then this is for you." They put the sack on the floor and took from it a hatchet, two knives, a short spear, a club and a blackjack.

"What's all that?" Tom asked, sitting upright.

"Weapons, of course," Jed Farmer said testily. "You can't be a real Criminal without weapons."

Tom scratched his head. "Is that a fact?"

"You'd better start figuring these things out for yourself," Farmer went on in his impatient voice. "Can't expect us to do everything for you."

Marv Carpenter winked at

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Tom. "Jed's sore because the Mayor made him our Postman."

"I'll do my part," Jed said. "I just don't like having to write all those letters."

"Can't be too hard," Marv Carpenter said, grinning. "The Postmen do it on Earth and they got a lot more people there. Good luck, Tom."

They left.

Tom bent down and examined the weapons. He knew what they were; the old books were full of them. But no one had ever actually used a weapon on New Delaware. The only native animals on the planet were small, furry, and confirmed eaters of grass. As for turning a weapon on a fellow villager — why would anybody want to do that?

He picked up one of the knives. It was cold. He touched the point. It was sharp.

Tom began to pace the floor, staring at the weapons. They gave him a queer sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He decided he had been hasty in accepting the job.

But there was no sense worrying about it yet. He still had those books to read. After that, perhaps he could make some sense out of the whole thing.

HE READ for several hours, stopping only to eat a light lunch. The books were understandable enough; the various Criminal methods were clearly explained, sometimes with diagrams. But the whole thing was unreasonable. What was the purpose of Crime? Whom did it benefit? What did people get out of it?

The books didn't explain that. He leafed through them, looking at the photographed faces of Criminals. They looked very serious and dedicated, extremely conscious of the significance of their work to society.

Tom wished he could find out what that significance was. It would probably make things much easier.

"Tom?" he heard the Mayor call from outside.

"I'm in here, Mayor," Tom said.

The door opened and the Mayor peered in. Behind him were Jane Farmer, Mary Waterman and Alice Cook.

"How about it, Tom?" the Mayor asked.

"How about what?"

"How about getting to work?"

Tom grinned self-consciously. "I was going to," he said. "I was reading these books, trying to figure out—"

The three middle-aged ladies glared at him, and Tom stopped in embarrassment.

"You're certainly taking your time reading," Alice Cook said.

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"Everyone else is outside working," said Jane Farmer.

"What's so hard about Stealing?" Mary Waterman challenged.

"It's true," the Mayor told him. "That Inspector might be here any day now and we don't have a Crime to show him."

"All right, all right," Tom said.

He stuck a knife and a blackjack in his belt, put the sack in his pocket — for Loot — and stalked out.

But where was he going? It was mid-afternoon. The market, which was the most logical place to rob, would be empty until evening. Besides, he didn't want to

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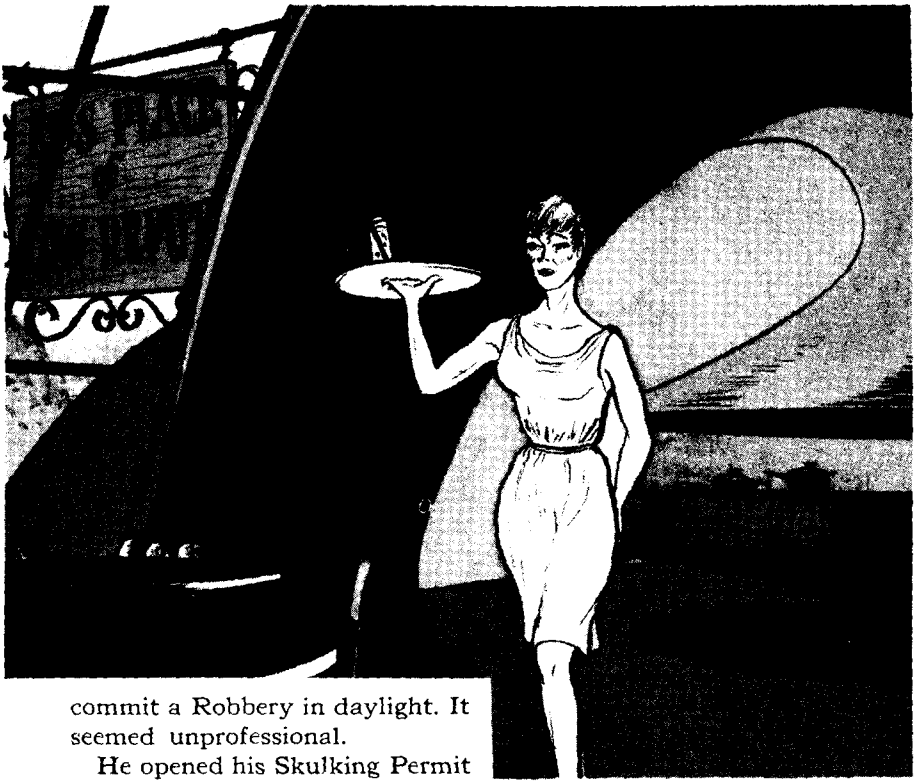

commit a Robbery in daylight. It seemed unprofessional.

He opened his Skulking Permit and read it through. *Required to Haunt Places of Low Repute . . .*

That was it! He'd haunt a Low Repute Place. He could form some plans there, get into the mood of the thing. But unfortunately, the village didn't have much to choose from. There was the Tiny Restaurant, run by the widowed Ames sisters, there was Jeff Hern's Lounging Spot, and finally there was Ed Beer's Tavern.

Ed's place would have to do.

THE Tavern was a cottage much like the other cottages in the village. It had one big room for guests, a kitchen, and family sleeping quarters. Ed's wife did the cooking and kept the place as clean as she could, considering her ailing back. Ed served the drinks. He was a pale, sleepy-eyed man with a talent for worrying.

"Hello, Tom," Ed said. "Hear you're our Criminal."

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"That's right," said Tom. "I'll take a perricola."

Ed Beer served him the non-alcoholic root extract and stood anxiously in front of Tom's table. "How come you ain't out Thieving, Tom?"

"I'm planning," Tom said. "My Permit says I have to Haunt Places of Low Repute. That's why I'm here."

"Is that nice?" Ed Beer asked sadly. "This is no Place of Low Repute, Tom."

"You serve the worst meals in town," Tom pointed out.

"I know. My wife can't cook. But there's a friendly atmosphere here. Folks like it."

"That's all changed, Ed. I'm making this tavern my headquarters."

Ed Beer's shoulders drooped. "Try to keep a nice place," he muttered. "A lot of thanks you get." He returned to the bar.

Tom proceeded to think. He found it amazingly difficult. The more he tried, the less came out. But he stuck grimly to it.

An hour passed. Richie Farmer, Jed's youngest son, stuck his head in the door. "You Steal anything yet, Tom?"

"Not yet," Tom told him, hunched over his table, still thinking.

The scorching afternoon drifted slowly by. Patches of evening became visible through the Tavern's small, not too clean windows. A cricket began to chirp outside, and the first whisper of night wind stirred the surrounding forest.

Big George Waterman and Max Weaver came in for a glass of glava. They sat down beside Tom.

"How's it going?" George Waterman asked.

"Not so good," Tom said. "Can't seem to get the hang of this Stealing."

"You'll catch on," Waterman said in his slow, ponderous, earnest fashion. "If anyone in this village could learn it, you can."

"We've got confidence in you, Tom," Weaver assured him.

Tom thanked them. They drank and left. He continued thinking, staring into his empty perricola glass.

An hour later, Ed Beer cleared his throat apologetically. "It's none of my business, Tom, but *when* are you going to Steal something?"

"Right now," Tom said.

He stood up, made sure his weapons were securely in place, and strode out the door.

NIGHTLY bartering had begun in the market. Goods were piled carelessly on benches, or spread over the grass on straw mats. There was no currency, no rate of exchange. Ten hand-

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wrought nails were worth a pail of milk or two fish, or vice versa, depending on what you had to barter and needed at the moment. No one ever bothered keeping accounts. That was one Earth custom the Mayor was having difficulty introducing.

As Tom Fisher walked down the square, everyone greeted him.

"Stealing now, huh, Tom?"

"Go to it, boy!"

"You can do it!"

No one in the village had ever witnessed an actual theft. They considered it an exotic custom of distant Earth and they wanted to see how it worked. They left their goods and followed Tom through the market, watching avidly.

Tom found that his hands were trembling. He didn't like having so many people watch him Steal. He decided he'd better work fast, while he still had the nerve.

He stopped abruptly in front of Mrs. Miller's fruit-laden bench. "Tasty-looking geefers," he said casually.

"They're fresh," Mrs. Miller told him. She was a small and bright-eyed old woman. Tom could remember long conversations she had had with his mother, back when his parents were alive.

"They look very tasty," he said, wishing he had stopped somewhere else instead.

"Oh, they are," said Mrs. Miller. "I picked them just this afternoon."

"Is he going to Steal now?" someone whispered.

"Sure he is. Watch him," someone whispered back.

Tom picked up a bright green geefer and inspected it. The crowd became suddenly silent.

"Certainly looks very tasty," Tom said, carefully replacing the geefer.

The crowd released a long-drawn sigh.

Max Weaver and his wife and five children were at the next bench. Tonight they were displaying two blankets and a shirt. They all smiled shyly when Tom came over, followed by the crowd.

"That shirt's about your size," Weaver informed him. He wished the people would go away and let Tom work.

"Hmm," Tom said, picking up the shirt.

The crowd stirred expectantly. A girl began to giggle hysterically. Tom gripped the shirt tightly and opened his Loot bag.

"JUST a moment!" Billy Painter pushed his way through. He was wearing a badge now, an old Earth coin he had polished and pinned to his belt. The expression on his face was unmistakably official.

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"What were you doing with that shirt, Tom?" Billy asked.

"Why . . . I was just looking at it."

"Just looking at it, huh?" Billy turned away, his hands clasped behind his back. Suddenly he whirled and extended a rigid forefinger. "I don't think you were just looking at it, Tom. I think you were planning on *Stealing* it!"

Tom didn't answer. The telltale sack hung limply from one hand, the shirt from the other.

"As Police Chief," Billy went on, "I've got a duty to protect these people. You're a Suspicious Character. I think I'd better lock you up for further questioning."

Tom hung his head. He hadn't expected this, but it was just as well.

Once he was in Jail, it would be all over. And when Billy released him, he could get back to fishing.

Suddenly the Mayor bounded through the crowd, his shirt flapping wildly around his waist.

"Billy, what are you doing?"

"Doing my duty, Mayor. Tom here is acting plenty suspicious. The book says—"

"I know what the book says," the Mayor told him. "I gave you the book. You can't go arresting Tom. Not yet."

"But there's no other Criminal in the village," Billy complained.

"I can't help that," the Mayor said.

Billy's lips tightened. "The book talks about Preventive Police Work. I'm supposed to stop Crime before it happens."

The Mayor raised his hands and dropped them wearily. "Billy, don't you understand? This village *needs* a Criminal record. You have to help, too."

Billy shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Mayor. I was just trying to do my job." He turned to go. Then he whirled again on Tom. "I'll still get you. Remember—Crime Does Not Pay." He stalked off.

"He's overambitious, Tom," the Mayor explained. "Forget it. Go ahead and Steal something. Let's get this job over with."

TOM started to edge away toward the green forest outside the village.

"What's wrong, Tom?" the Mayor asked worriedly.

"I'm not in the mood any more," Tom said. "Maybe tomorrow night—"

"No, right now," the Mayor insisted. "You can't go on putting it off. Come on, we'll all help you."

"Sure we will," Max Weaver said. "Steal the shirt, Tom. It's your size anyhow."

"How about a nice water jug, Tom?"

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"Look at these skeegee nuts over here."

Tom looked from bench to bench. As he reached for Weaver's shirt, a knife slipped from his belt and dropped to the ground. The crowd clucked sympathetically.

Tom replaced it, perspiring, knowing he looked like a butterfingers. He reached out, took the shirt and stuffed it into the Loot Bag. The crowd cheered.

Tom smiled faintly, feeling a bit better. "I think I'm getting the hang of it."

"Sure you are."

"We knew you could do it."

"Take something else, boy."

Tom walked down the market and helped himself to a length of rope, a handful of skeegee nuts and a grass hat.

"I guess that's enough," he told the Mayor.

"Enough for now," the Mayor agreed. "This doesn't really count, you know. This was the same as people giving it to you. Practice, you might say."

"Oh," Tom said, disappointed.

"But you know what you're doing. The next time it'll be just as easy."

"I suppose it will."

"And don't forget that Murder."

"Is it really necessary?" Tom asked.

"I wish it weren't," the Mayor said. "But this colony has been here for over two hundred years and we haven't had a single Murder. Not one! According to the records, all the other colonies had lots."

"I suppose we should have one," Tom admitted. "I'll take care of it." He headed for his cottage. The crowd gave a rousing cheer as he departed.

AT home, Tom lighted a rush lamp and fixed himself supper. After eating, he sat for a long time in his big armchair. He was dissatisfied with himself. He had not really handled the Stealing well. All day he had worried and hesitated. People had practically had to put things in his hands before he could take them.

A fine Thief he was!

And there was no excuse for it. Stealing and Murdering were like any other necessary jobs. Just because he had never done them before, just because he could see no sense to them, that was no reason to bungle them.

He walked to the door. It was a fine night, illuminated by a dozen nearby giant stars. The market was deserted again and the village lights were winking out.

This was the time to Steal!

A thrill ran through him at the thought. He was proud of him-

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self. That was how Criminals planned and this was how Stealing should be—skulking, late at night.

Quickly Tom checked his weapons, emptied his Loot Sack and walked out.

The last rush lights were extinguished. Tom moved noiselessly through the village. He came to Roger Waterman's house. Big Roger had left his spade propped against a wall. Tom picked it up. Down the block, Mrs. Weaver's water jug was in its usual place beside the front door. Tom took it. On his way home, he found a little wooden horse that some child had forgotten. It went with the rest.

He was pleasantly exhilarated, once the goods were safely home. He decided to make another haul.

This time he returned with a bronze plaque from the Mayor's house, Marv Carpenter's best saw, and Jed Farmer's sickle.

"Not bad," he told himself. He *was* catching on. One more load would constitute a good night's work.

This time he found a hammer and chisel in Ron Stone's shed, and a reed basket at Alice Cook's house. He was about to take Jeff Hern's rake when he heard a faint noise. He flattened himself against a wall.

Billy Painter came prowling quietly along, his badge gleaming in the starlight. In one hand, he carried a short, heavy club; in the other, a pair of homemade handcuffs. In the dim light, his face was ominous. It was the face of a man who had pledged himself against Crime, even though he wasn't really sure what it was.

Tom held his breath as Billy Painter passed within ten feet of him. Slowly Tom backed away.

The Loot Sack jingled.

"Who's there?" Billy yelled. When no one answered, he turned a slow circle, peering into the shadows. Tom was flattened against a wall again. He was fairly sure Billy wouldn't see him. Billy had weak eyes because of the fumes of the paint he mixed. All Painters had weak eyes. It was one of the reasons they were moody.

"Is that you, Tom?" Billy asked, in a friendly tone. Tom was about to answer, when he noticed that Billy's club was raised in a striking position. He kept quiet.

"I'll get you yet!" Billy shouted.

"Well, get him in the morning!" Jeff Hern shouted from his bedroom window. "Some of us are trying to sleep."

Billy moved away. When he was gone, Tom hurried home and dumped his pile of Loot on the floor with the rest. He surveyed his haul proudly. It gave him the

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sense of a job well done.

After a cool drink of glava, Tom went to bed, falling at once into a peaceful, dreamless sleep.

NEXT morning, Tom sauntered out to see how the Little Red Schoolhouse was progressing. The Carpenter boys were hard at work on it, helped by several villagers.

"How's it coming?" Tom called out cheerfully.

"Fair," Marv Carpenter said. "It'd come along better if I had my saw."

"Your saw?" Tom repeated blankly.

After a moment, he remembered that *he* had stolen it last night. It hadn't seemed to belong to anyone then. The saw and all the rest had been objects to be stolen. He had never given a thought to the fact that they might be used or needed.

Marv Carpenter asked, "Do you suppose I could use the saw for a while? Just for an hour or so?"

"I'm not sure," Tom said, frowning. "It's legally Stolen, you know."

"Of course it is. But if I could just borrow it—"

"You'd have to give it back."

"Well, naturally I'd give it back," Marv said indignantly. "I wouldn't keep anything that was legally stolen."

"It's in the house with the rest of the Loot."

Marv thanked him and hurried after it.

Tom began to stroll through the village. He reached the Mayor's house. The Mayor was standing outside, staring at the sky.

"Tom, did you take my bronze plaque?" he asked.

"I certainly did," Tom said belligerently.

"Oh. Just wondering." The Mayor pointed upward. "See it?"

Tom looked. "What?"

"Black dot near the rim of the small sun."

"Yes. What is it?"

"I'll bet it's the Inspector's ship. How's your work coming?"

"Fine," Tom said, a trifle uncomfortably.

"Got your Murder planned?"

"I've been having a little trouble with that," Tom confessed. "To tell the truth, I haven't made any progress on it at all."

"Come on in, Tom. I want to talk to you."

INSIDE the cool, shuttered living room, the Mayor poured two glasses of glava and motioned Tom to a chair.

"Our time is running short," the Mayor said gloomily. "The Inspector may land any hour now. And my hands are full." He motioned at the Interstellar Ra-

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dio. "*That* has been talking again. Something about a revolt on Deng IV and all loyal Earth colonies are to prepare for conscription, whatever that is. I never even heard of Deng IV, but I have to start worrying about it, in addition to everything else."

He fixed Tom with a stern stare. "Criminals on Earth commit dozens of Murders a day and never even think about it. All your village wants of you is one little Killing. Is that too much to ask?"

Tom spread his hands nervously. "Do you really think it's necessary?"

"You know it is," the Mayor said. "If we're going Earthly, we have to go all the way. This is the only thing holding us back. All the other projects are right on schedule."

Billy Painter entered, wearing a new official-blue shirt with bright metal buttons. He sank into a chair.

"Kill anyone yet, Tom?"

The Mayor said, "He wants to know if it's *necessary*."

"Of course it is," the Police Chief said. "Read any of the books. You're not much of a Criminal if you don't Commit a Murder."

"Who'll it be, Tom?" the Mayor asked.

Tom squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. He rubbed his fingers together nervously.

"Well?"

"Oh, I'll kill Jeff Hern," Tom blurted.

Billy Painter leaned forward quickly. "Why?" he asked.

"Why? Why *not?*"

"What's your Motive?"

"I thought you just wanted a Murder," Tom retorted. "Who said anything about Motive?"

"We can't have *a* fake Murder," the Police Chief explained. "It has to be done right. And that means you have to have a proper Motive."

Tom thought for a moment. "Well, I don't know Jeff well. Is that a good enough motive?"

The Mayor shook his head. "No, Tom, that won't do. Better pick someone else."

"Let's see," Tom said. "How about George Waterman?"

"What's the Motive?" Billy asked immediately.

"Oh . . . um . . . Well, I don't like the way George walks. Never did. And he's noisy sometimes."

The Mayor nodded approvingly. "Sounds good to me. What do you say, Billy?"

"How am I supposed to deduce a Motive like that?" Billy asked angrily. "No, that might be good enough for a Crime of Passion. But you're a legal Criminal, Tom. By definition, you're Cold-blooded, Ruthless and Cunning. You can't Kill someone just be-

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cause you don't like the way he walks. That's *silly*."

"I'd better think this whole thing over," Tom said, standing up.

"Don't take too long," the Mayor told him. "The sooner it's done, the better."

Tom nodded and started out the door.

"Oh, Tom!" Billy called. "Don't forget to leave Clues. They're very important."

"All right," Tom said, and left.

OUTSIDE, most of the villagers were watching the sky. The black dot had grown immensely larger. It covered most of the smaller sun.

Tom went to his Place of Low Repute to think things out. Ed Beer had apparently changed his mind about the desirability of Criminal elements. The Tavern was redecorated. There was a large sign, reading: CRIMINAL'S LAIR. Inside, there were new, carefully soiled curtains on the windows, blocking the daylight and making the Tavern truly a Dismal Retreat. Weapons, hastily carved out of soft wood, hung on one wall. On another wall was a large red splotch, an ominous-looking thing, even though Tom knew it was only Billy Painter's rootberry red paint.

"Come right in, Tom," Ed Beer said, and led him to the darkest corner in the room. Tom noticed that the Tavern was unusually filled for the time of day. People seemed to like the idea of being in a genuine Criminal's Lair.

Tom sipped a perricola and began to think.

He had to Commit a Murder.

He took out his Skulking Permit and looked it over. Unpleasant, unpalatable, something he wouldn't normally do, but he did have the legal obligation.

Tom drank his perricola and concentrated on Murder. He told himself he was going to *kill* someone. He had to *snuff out a life.* He would make someone *cease to exist.*

But the phrases didn't contain the essence of the act. They were just words. To clarify his thoughts, he took big, red-headed Marv Carpenter as an example. Today, Marv was working on the Schoolhouse with his borrowed saw. If Tom killed Marv—well, Marv wouldn't work any more.

Tom shook his head impatiently. He still wasn't grasping it.

All right, here was Marv Carpenter, biggest and, many thought, the pleasantest of the Carpenter boys. He'd be planing down a piece of wood, grasping the plane firmly in his large freckled hands, squinting down the line he had drawn. Thirsty, undoubtedly, and with a small

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pain in his left shoulder that Jan Druggist was unsuccessfully treating.

That was Marv Carpenter.

Then—

Marv Carpenter sprawled on the ground, his eyes glaring open, limbs stiff, mouth twisted, no air going in or out his nostrils, no beat to his heart. Never again to hold a piece of wood in his large, freckled hands. Never again to feel the small and really unimportant pain in his shoulder that Jan Druggist was—

For just a moment, Tom glimpsed what Murder really was. The vision passed, but enough of a memory remained to make him feel sick.

He could live with the Thieving. But Murder, even in the best interests of the village . . .

What would people think, after they saw what he had just imagined? How could he live with them? How could he live with himself afterward?

And yet he had to kill. Everybody in the village had a job and that was his.

But whom could he Murder?

THE excitement started later in the day when the Interstellar Radio was filled with angry voices.

"Call *that* a colony? Where's the capital?"

"This is it," the Mayor replied.

"Where's your landing field?"

"I think it's being used as a pasture," the Mayor said. "I could look up where it was. No ship has landed here in over—"

"The main ship will stay aloft then. Assemble your officials. I am coming down immediately."

The entire village gathered around an open field that the Inspector designated. Tom strapped on his weapons and Skulked behind a tree, watching.

A small ship detached itself from the big one and dropped swiftly down. It plummeted toward the field while the villagers held their breaths, certain it would crash. At the last moment, jets flared, scorching the grass, and the ship settled gently to the ground.

The Mayor edged forward, followed by Billy Painter. A door in the ship opened, and four men marched out. They held shining metallic instruments that Tom knew were weapons. After them came a large, red-faced man dressed in black, wearing four bright medals. He was followed by a little man with a wrinkled face, also dressed in black. Four more uniformed men followed him.

"Welcome to New Delaware," the Mayor said.

"Thank you, General," the big man said, shaking the Mayor's hand firmly. "I am Inspector

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SKULKING PERMIT

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Delumaine. This is Mr. Grent, my Political Adviser."

Grent nodded to the Mayor, ignoring his outstretched hand. He was looking at the villagers with an expression of mild disgust.

"We will survey the village," the Inspector said, glancing at Grent out of the corner of his eye. Grent nodded. The uniformed guards closed around them.

Tom followed at a safe distance, Skulking in true Criminal fashion. In the village, he hid behind a house to watch the Inspection.

The Mayor pointed out, with pardonable pride, the Jail, the Post Office, the Church and the Little Red Schoolhouse. The Inspector seemed bewildered. Mr. Grent smiled unpleasantly and rubbed his jaw.

"As I thought," he told the Inspector. "A waste of time, fuel and a battle cruiser. This place has nothing of value."

"I'm not so sure," the Inspector said. He turned to the Mayor. "But what did you build them for, General?"

"Why, to be Earthly," the Mayor said. "We're doing our best, as you can see."

MR. GRENT whispered something in the Inspector's ear.

"Tell me," the Inspector asked the Mayor, "how many young men are there in the village?"

"I beg your pardon?" The Mayor said in polite bewilderment.

"Young men between the ages of fifteen and sixty," Mr. Grent explained.

"You see, General, Imperial Mother Earth is engaged in a war. The colonists on Deng IV and some other colonies have turned against their birthright. They are revolting against the absolute authority of Mother Earth."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the Mayor said sympathetically.

"We need men for the Space Fleet," the Inspector told him. "Good healthy fighting men. Our reserves are depleted—"

"We wish," Mr. Grent broke in smoothly, "to give all loyal Earth colonists a chance to fight for Imperial Mother Earth. We are sure you won't refuse."

"Oh, no," the Mayor said. "Certainly not. I'm sure our young men will be glad—I mean they don't know much about it, but they're all bright boys. They can learn, I guess."

"You see?" the Inspector said to Mr. Grent. "Sixty, seventy, perhaps a hundred recruits. Not such a waste after all."

Mr. Grent still looked dubious.

The Inspector and his Adviser went to the Mayor's house for

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refreshment. Four soldiers accompanied them. The other four walked around the village, helping themselves to anything they found.

Tom hid in the woods nearby to think things over. In the early evening, Mrs. Ed Beer came furtively out of the village. She was a gaunt, grayish-blonde middle-aged woman, but she moved quite rapidly in spite of her case of housemaid's knee. She had a basket with her, covered with a red checkered napkin.

"Here's your dinner," she said, as soon as she found Tom.

"Why . . . thanks," said Tom, taken by surprise, "You didn't have to do that."

"I certainly did. Our Tavern is your Place of Low Repute, isn't it? We're responsible for your well-being. And the Mayor sent you a message."

Tom looked up, his mouth full of food. "What is it?"

"He said to hurry up with the Murder. He's been stalling the Inspector and that nasty little Grent man. But they're going to ask him. He's sure of it."

Tom nodded.

"When are you going to do it?" Mrs. Beer asked, cocking her head to one side.

"I mustn't tell you," Tom said.

"Of course you must. I'm a Criminal's Accomplice." Mrs. Beer leaned closer.

"That's true," Tom admitted thoughtfully. "Well, I'm going to do it tonight. After dark. Tell Billy Painter I'll leave all the fingerprints I can, and any other clues I think of."

"All right, Tom," Mrs. Beer said. "Good luck."

TOM waited for dark, meanwhile watching the village. He noticed that most of the soldiers had been drinking. They swaggered around as though the villagers didn't exist. One of them fired his weapon into the air, frightening all the small, furry grass-eaters for miles around.

The Inspector and Mr. Grent were still in the Mayor's house.

Night came. Tom slipped into the village and stationed himself in an alley between two houses. He drew his knife and waited.

Someone was approaching! He tried to remember his Criminal Methods, but nothing came. He knew he would just have to do the Murder as best he could, and fast.

The person came up, his figure indistinct in the darkness.

"Why, hello, Tom." It was the Mayor. He looked at the knife. "What are you doing?"

"You said there had to be a Murder, so—"

"I didn't mean *me*," the Mayor said, backing away. "It can't be me."

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"Why not?" Tom asked.

"Well, for one thing, somebody has to talk to the Inspector. He's waiting for me. Someone has to show him—"

"Billy Painter can do that," said Tom. He grasped the Mayor by the shirt front, raised the knife and aimed for the throat. "Nothing personal, of course," he added.

"Wait!" the Mayor cried. "If there's nothing personal, then you have no Motive!"

Tom lowered the knife, but kept his grasp on the Mayor's shirt. "I guess I can think of one. I've been pretty sore about you appointing me Criminal."

"It was the Mayor who appointed you, wasn't it?"

"Well, sure—"

The Mayor pulled Tom out of the shadows, into the bright starlight. "Look!"

Tom gaped. The Mayor was dressed in long, sharply creased pants and a tunic resplendent with medals. On each shoulder was a double row of ten stars. His hat was thickly crusted with gold braid in the shape of comets.

"You see, Tom? I'm not the Mayor any more. I'm a *General!*"

"What's that got to do with it? You're the same person, aren't you?"

"Not officially. You missed the ceremony this afternoon. The Inspector said that since I was officially a General, I had to wear a General's uniform. It was a very friendly ceremony. All the Earthmen were grinning and winking at me and each other."

RAISING the knife again, Tom held it as he would to gut a fish. "Congratulations," he said sincerely, "but you were the Mayor when you appointed me Criminal, so my Motive still holds."

"But you wouldn't be Killing the Mayor! You'd be Killing a General! And that's not Murder!"

"It isn't?" Tom asked. "What is it then?"

"Why, Killing a General is Mutiny!"

"Oh." Tom put down the knife. He released the Mayor. "Sorry."

"Quite all right," the Mayor said. "Natural error. I've read up on it and you haven't, of course—no need to." He took a deep breath. "I'd better get back. The Inspector wants a list of the men he can Draft."

Tom called out, "Are you sure this Murder is necessary?"

"Yes, absolutely," the Mayor said, hurrying away. "Just not *me*."

Tom put the knife back in his belt.

Not me, not me. Everyone would feel that way. Yet somebody had to be Murdered. Who? He couldn't Kill himself. That

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would be Suicide, which wouldn't count.

He began to shiver, trying not to think of the glimpse he'd had of the reality of Murder. The job had to be done.

Someone else was coming!

The person came nearer. Tom hunched down, his muscles tightening for the leap.

It was Mrs. Miller, returning home with a bag of vegetables.

Tom told himself that it didn't matter whether it was Mrs. Miller or anybody else. But he couldn't help remembering those conversations with his mother. They left him without a Motive for Killing Mrs. Miller.

She passed by without seeing him.

He waited for half an hour. Another person walked through the dark alley between the houses. Tom recognized him as Max Weaver.

Tom had always liked him. But that didn't mean there couldn't be a Motive. All he could come up with, though, was that Max had a wife and five children who loved him and would miss him. Tom didn't want Billy Painter to tell him that that was no Motive. He drew deeper into the shadow and let Max go safely by.

The three Carpenter boys came along. Tom had painfully been through that already. He let them pass. Then Roger Waterman approached.

He had no real Motive for Killing Roger, but he had never been especially friendly with him. Besides, Roger had no children and his wife wasn't fond of him. Would that be enough for Billy Painter to work on?

He knew it wouldn't be . . . and the same was true of all the villagers. He had grown up with these people, shared food and work and fun and grief with them. How could he possibly have a Motive for Killing any of them?

But he had to Commit a Murder. His Skulking Permit required it. He couldn't let the village down. But neither could he Kill the people he had known all his life.

Wait, he told himself in sudden excitement. He could Kill the Inspector!

MOTIVE? Why, it would be an even more Heinous Crime than Murdering the Mayor—except that the Mayor was a General now, of course, and that would only be Mutiny. But even if the Mayor were still Mayor, the Inspector would be a far more important Victim. Tom would be Killing for Glory, for Fame, for Notoriety. And the Murder would show Earth how Earthly the colony really was. They would say, "Crime is so bad on New Dela-

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ware that it's hardly safe to land there. A Criminal actually Killed our Inspector on the very first day! Worst Criminal we've come across in all space."

It would be the most spectacular Crime he could Commit, Tom realized, just the sort of thing a Master Criminal would do.

Feeling proud of himself for the first time in a long while, Tom hurried out of the alley and over to the Mayor's house. He could hear conversation going on inside.

". . . sufficiently passive population," Mr. Grent was saying. "Sheeplike, in fact."

"Makes it rather boring," the Inspector answered. "For the soldiers especially."

"Well, what do you expect from backward agrarians? At least we're getting some recruits out of it." Mr. Grent yawned audibly. "On your feet, guards. We're going back to the ship."

Guards! Tom had forgotten about them. He looked doubtfully at his knife. Even if he sprang at the Inspector, the guards would probably stop him before the Murder could be Committed. They must have been trained for just that sort of thing.

But if he had one of their own weapons . . .

He heard the shuffling of feet inside. Tom hurried back into the village.

Near the market, he saw a soldier sitting on a doorstep, singing drunkenly to himself. Two empty bottles lay at his feet and his weapon was slung sloppily over his shoulder.

Tom crept up, drew his blackjack and took aim.

The soldier must have glimpsed his shadow. He leaped to his feet, ducking the stroke of the blackjack. In the same motion, he jabbed with his slung rifle, catching Tom in the ribs, tore the rifle from his shoulder and aimed. Tom closed his eyes and lashed out with both feet.

He caught the soldier on the knee, knocking him over. Before he could get up, Tom swung the blackjack.

Tom felt the soldier's pulse—no sense Killing the wrong man—and found it satisfactory. He took the weapon, checked to make sure he knew which button to push, and hastened after the Inspector.

HALFWAY to the ship, he caught up with them. The Inspector and Grent were walking ahead, the soldiers straggling behind.

Tom moved into the underbrush. He trotted silently along until he was opposite Grent and the Inspector. He took aim and his finger tightened on the trigger . . .

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He didn't want to Kill Grent, though. He was supposed to Commit only one Murder.

He ran on, past the Inspector's party, and came out on the road in front of them. His weapon was poised as the party reached him.

"What's this?" the Inspector demanded.

"Stand still," Tom said. "The rest of you drop your weapons and move out of the way."

The soldiers moved like men in shock. One by one they dropped their weapons and retreated to the underbrush. Grent held his ground.

"What are you doing, boy?" he asked.

"I'm the town Criminal," Tom stated proudly. "I'm going to Kill the Inspector. Please move out of the way."

Grent stared at him. "Criminal? So that's what the Mayor was prattling about."

"I know we haven't had any Murder in two hundred years," Tom explained, "but I'm changing that right now. *Move out of the way!*"

Grent leaped out of the line of fire. The Inspector stood alone, swaying slightly.

Tom took aim, trying to think about the spectacular nature of his Crime and its social value. But he saw the Inspector on the ground, eyes glaring open, limbs stiff, mouth twisted, no air going in or out the nostrils, no beat to the heart.

He tried to force his finger to close on the trigger. His mind could talk all it wished about the desirability of Crime; his hand knew better.

"I can't!" Tom shouted.

He threw down the gun and sprinted into the underbrush.

THE Inspector wanted to send a search party out for Tom and hang him on the spot. Mr. Grent didn't agree. New Delaware was all forest. Ten thousand men couldn't have caught a fugitive in the forest, if he didn't want to be caught.

The Mayor and several villagers came out, to find out about the commotion. The soldiers formed a hollow square around the Inspector and Mr. Grent. They stood with weapons ready, their faces set and serious.

And the Mayor explained everything. The village's uncivilized lack of Crime. The job that Tom had been given. How ashamed they were that he had been unable to handle it.

"Why did you give the assignment to that particular man?" Mr. Grent asked.

"Well," the Mayor said, "I figured if anyone could Kill, Tom could. He's a Fisher, you know. Pretty gory work."

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"Then the rest of you would be equally unable to kill?"

"We wouldn't even get as far as Tom did," the Mayor admitted sadly.

Mr. Grent and the Inspector looked at each other, then at the soldiers. The soldiers were staring at the villagers with wonder and respect. They started to whisper among themselves.

"Attention!" the Inspector bellowed. He turned to Grent and said in a low voice, "We'd better get away from here. Men in our armies who can't kill . . ."

"The morale," Mr. Grent said. He shuddered. "The possibility of infection. One man in a key position endangering a ship—perhaps a fleet—because he can't fire a weapon. It isn't worth the risk."

They ordered the soldiers back to the ship. The soldiers seemed to march more slowly than usual, and they looked back at the village. They whispered together, even though the Inspector was bellowing orders.

The small ship took off in a flurry of jets. Soon it was swallowed in the large ship. And then the large ship was gone.

The edge of the enormous watery red sun was just above the horizon.

"YOU can come out now," the Mayor called. Tom emerged from the underbrush, where he had been hiding, watching everything.

"I bungled it," he said miserably.

"Don't feel bad about it," Billy Painter told him. "It was an impossible job."

"I'm afraid it was," the Mayor said, as they walked back to the village. "I thought that just possibly you could swing it. But you can't be blamed. There's not another man in the village who could have done the job even as well."

"What'll we do with these buildings?" Billy Painter asked, motioning at the Jail, the Post Office, the Church, and the Little Red Schoolhouse.

The Mayor thought deeply for a moment. "I know," he said. "We'll build a playground for the kids. Swings and slides and sandboxes and things."

"*Another* playground?" Tom asked.

"Sure. Why not?"

There was no reason, of course, why not.

"I won't be needing this any more, I guess," Tom said, handing the Skulking Permit to the Mayor.

"No, I guess not," said the Mayor. They watched him sorrowfully as he tore it up. "Well, we did our best. It just wasn't good enough."

"I had the chance," Tom mut-

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tered, "and then I let you all down."

Billy Painter put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "It's not your fault, Tom. It's not the fault of any of us. It's just what comes of not being civilized for two hundred years. Look how long it took Earth to get civilized. Thousands of years. And we were trying to do it in two weeks."

"Well, we'll just have to go back to being uncivilized," the Mayor said with a hollow attempt at cheerfulness.

Tom yawned, waved, went home to catch up on lost sleep. Before entering, he glanced at the sky.

Thick, swollen clouds had gathered overhead and every one of them had a black lining. The fall rains were almost here. Soon he could start fishing again.

Now why couldn't he have thought of the Inspector as a fish? He was too tired to examine that as a Motive. In any case, it was too late. Earth was gone from them and civilization had fled for no one knew how many centuries more.

He slept very badly.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of August, 1954.

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Play Back

By J. T. McINTOSH

There was never tomorrow, only yesterday—and to Bert Siddon, it was the ideal arrangement!

Illustrated by KRIGSTEIN

THINGS were very quiet. Bert Siddon was leaning on his arms on one side of the bar while the most regular of his regular customers kept the other side from falling down. The orders were given to Bert, but executed by Bill, his less-than-monosyllabic assistant.

It was Monday night, and Monday in the Golden Swan generally turned out to be discussion night. Someone unidentified had poked his head in, said disgustedly, "For Pete's sake, the Brains," and disappeared again.

It was usual on Monday nights for the paradoxes, stupidities and injustices of the world to be discovered between seven and eight-thirty P.M. and set right before nine-thirty to the satisfaction of everybody except Harry Smith, who was never satisfied, and the Professor, to whom nothing was as simple as that and very little was simple at all.

"The wife would never believe we was talking about science and things," said Jim Moir, marveling at it himself. "She thinks that whenever men get together and

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talk, it's always sex or sports."

"Don't mention women," said Harry Smith gloomily. "They're enough to drive you to drink." He raised his glass.

"I've given up women," Alec Harper announced. "I'm getting old. No more whisky and women for me. I'm going to spend my money on chocolate from now on and enjoy myself."

Bert continued to lean on his arms and beam happily at the company. Bill continued to do all the work behind the bar, silently for the most part, but with an occasional caustic grunt to show he didn't believe a word of any of it.

"We know what you think about women, Bert," said Moir enviously. "If *my* wife looked like Marilyn Monroe, maybe *I* would—"

"It's not just looks," said Bert contentedly. "My wife's an angel."

"You're lucky," Smith grunted. "Mine's still living."

HARPER'S bellowing laugh rattled the bottles behind Bert.

"You won't believe what I'm going to tell you," Bert remarked.

"Don't suppose we will," said Harper agreeably, "but let's hear you just the same."

"If I could have my pick of all the women in the world," said Bert, "I'd still choose Martha."

Considering the emphasis he put on it, his pronouncement fell rather flat. But then, they didn't realize that he *could* have his pick of all the women in the world, in a way. That he could have anything he wanted. That what he had was all he did want.

This time, anyway.

Maybe the next time he would—

"My round," said Smith. "No whisky for you, Alec?"

"Well . . ." said Harper, and everybody laughed.

It was established by argument and experiment that a pint glass full of beer could hold twenty-three pennies without spilling a drop. This advanced exercise in science and mathematics naturally led to bigger things. It was quite independent of Bert that the subject of time travel was reached.

Bert didn't mind. He couldn't tell his friends about his gift (he had done that once, with very nearly disastrous results), but he didn't mind hearing what they had to say about time travel.

"Blooming nonsense," said Smith. "It just ain't possible and that's all there is to it. Stands to reason."

"Nothing's impossible," argued Moir—firmly, for him. "Nothing's ever impossible."

"Time travel is," said Smith flatly.

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"Just as well," Harper said, "or the government would take it over and lose money on it." He bellowed with laughter again. Harper was a man who appreciated his own jokes.

"Where's the Professor?" he went on cheerfully. "Oh, there he is. He's such a little fellow that when he takes his glasses off, you can scarcely see him at all. Professor, does it stand to reason that time travel's impossible? Or is nothing ever impossible?"

They looked at the Professor, who was not, of course, a professor except when he was in the Golden Swan.

"The possibility or impossibility of very few things actually stands to reason," he said diffidently. "There are very few things of which one can confidently and conscientiously say, 'It's impossible and will always be impossible.' "

But on the whole he thought time travel was more or less, to a great extent, and by and large, one of these things. Though he might be wrong, of course.

Bert Siddon continued leaning on his arms and listening.

THEY considered the paradox of Beethoven writing the Moonlight Sonata and someone else taking it back a few weeks in time and playing it to him before he had written it. Who composed it? In Time Two, certainly not Beethoven, for he had heard it played to him as a new piece of music, something he had never heard before. Having heard it, he might write it down, but he could no longer compose it.

They discussed the question of a man going back in time and seeking himself out. Could there be two of him at the same time, or only one? Would he be able to meet and talk to himself, or would one of him automatically cease to exist when the other came into existence in the same time?

Bill grunted disgustedly.

"Look at this," said Smith derisively. "Just look at it and tell me if it doesn't prove the whole idea of time travel is plain damned nonsense. If time travel was possible, wouldn't someone in the future have found out how to do it? And wouldn't he have gone back to test it? Well, have you ever seen a time traveler?"

"Hold on," Harper objected. "How do you know I'm not from the twenty-third century? I'm not going to tell you I'm a time traveler, am I? I'd be thrown in an asylum or something. Well, the hell with it, I'll take the risk. I'm from the twenty-third century, Harry."

Smith sniffed.

"You don't believe me? Maybe you wouldn't believe the real time

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traveler, either. And if you didn't believe him when he told you, how the devil could you believe him when he didn't?"

Bert smiled, because he was the only man who knew anything about it. The only man in the world.

He often leaned on his arms and smiled, whatever the conversation was about. If it was about football, he might happen to remember who was going to beat whom 2-1 on Saturday, and he'd certainly remember the winners for the season. If it was about baseball, he'd know the pennant and series results.

And though he never set himself up as a prophet, it was fair enough to say casually, "Well, I'm not a betting man, but you watch Marbulla in the Derby," or, "No, the Administration looks pretty safe to go back, but *I* think . . ."

He didn't like to go further than that, *knowing* Marbulla was going to win the Derby and the opposition the next national election . . . having seen them do it, in fact.

It was in much the same way that, in this discussion, he said at last judicially, "You all seem to be taking it for granted that if time travel could be done, you'd need a machine to do it. In all the stories, it's always a time machine of some kind—"

"Naturally it's a machine," said Smith. "What else could it be?"

"A human being is a time machine," the Professor pointed out mildly. "He travels forward regularly through time. So is a building, a book, a photograph record. Anything. Everything."

SMITH brushed that aside. "Talk sense. If you're going to do any funny work with time—not that I'm saying you can—if you're going to do any moving around in time, except just move forward at the usual speed, how are you going to do it except with a machine?"

"You can move about the floor without a machine, can't you?" asked Bert. "You don't need a helicopter to get across to the dart board, do you?"

"You think people can walk through time?" Smith sarcastically wanted to know.

"Why not? You can't do it with a machine, can you? Well, why say that if it can ever be done, it must be done with a machine?"

"That's a good argument," agreed the Professor. "A very good argument. But how would you—how could it be done, if it *could* be done, Mr. Siddon? Have you any ideas on that?"

"If I knew that," said Bert, enjoying this, "I'd be doing it, I suppose. But how's this for an idea? Think about ten minutes

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ago. If you can go back ten minutes, you can travel in time, can't you? Well, concentrate on ten minutes ago. Jim Moir was talking, Harry was just finishing a pint, a car turned outside and its lights flashed in those mirrors there. Some of us can remember better than others. Some of us can only remember roughly what happened. Some of us can almost hear Jim talking and see the lights flashing."

Everybody tried to hear Jim talking and see the lights flashing.

"Well, granted that some of us do it better than others," Bert went on, "what if somebody could do it perfectly? Maybe he'd find Jim really *was* talking, the lights really were flashing—and it was actually ten minutes ago."

"Say that again," said Jim Moir.

Bert obliged. Of course, it would be more than just remembering. It would be—it *was*—something only one man could do. Otherwise, every time the clock was set back, everybody would know it had been set back.

As it was, only one man knew. Only one man benefited. Only one knew what had happened.

Only one man walked through time.

But Bert didn't tell them that, naturally.

"If you can remember what happened well enough," he suggested, "maybe you can make it happen again. And if it works for ten minutes, why shouldn't it work for twenty years?"

Bert wasn't annoyed when a chorus of ridicule broke out, for Bert *knew*. It was like going back a few years, telling people about the atom bomb and jet planes and listening to them "proving" they were impossible. He'd done that, too.

PRESENTLY, however, the Brains became interested in the thing, possible or not, and discussed what it would be like, independent of its improbability. The idea appealed particularly to Harper and the Professor.

"You'd only be able to go back over your own life," Smith remarked.

"Yes, you'd only be able to go back to the first thing you remembered, and to times you remembered well," said Bert. "But after all, you could only do this if you had a better memory than anybody has, so that wouldn't worry you."

"*You've* got a pretty good memory, Bert," Moir observed. "Better than anyone else I know. You can always—"

"You'd put everything else back each time," the Professor mused. "Think of having a second chance at everything!"

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The others also saw the possibilities.

"You could make a lot of money."

"Money? A fortune!"

"Money's only the start. You could do anything, if you knew what everybody else was going to do."

"You could rule the Earth!"

"No, you couldn't, because you'd still be ordinary."

"Ordinary? With all the money you'd have from the horses, the pools, the stock exchange? You'd be the richest man in the world —and how could the richest man in the world be ordinary?"

It was Bert who brought the discussion down to the level of sense and sobriety.

"If it were me," he said contentedly, "I don't think I'd want anything more than I've got."

"Maybe not," said Moir, jealous again. "It's all right for *you* to say that."

Bert knew what he meant. "I'd have to live quite a few extra lives before I found a girl like Martha."

"But you found her the first time."

"Yes," Bert agreed blandly.

"You'd always be able to do things better than anybody else," said Harper. "Like darts."

He took the three darts and demonstrated humorously. He wasn't the best darts player present, by any means. Nevertheless, with the first dart he scored a perfect treble twenty.

"We'll count that," he declared, laughed and tried again. Treble one.

He took back the dart, poised once more and said — "Time switch!" Single twenty. He tried again — "Time switch!" — and eventually, in eleven tries, scored three treble twenties.

"There you are," he said triumphantly. "Three darts—three treble twenties."

"That's the only way you could ever win," Smith grunted.

"That's how it would work," Bert nodded. "It would be the same with most games. Suppose I was playing Bobby Locke . . ."

THERE was a chorus of derisive laughter. They all knew Bert's golf.

"Still, I must admit he's improving," said Harper, like a man determined to be fair. "Last time I was out with him, he started with 12, 10, 11 at the first three holes—but then he tightened up after that."

"Suppose I was playing Bobby Locke," persisted Bert with unimpaired good humor. "It might take three tries before I got a decent drive—"

"It *might*?" Harper asked, with a shout of laughter.

"And I'd know I'd needed

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three tries, but Bobby Locke wouldn't. Then, for the second, I wouldn't try anything spectacular —just onto the green."

There was another howl of laughter, in which Bert joined.

"That might take about half a dozen shots," he admitted, "but it would still only count two. And I'd hole out the next time for a three. Even Bobby Locke couldn't stand up to that sort of competition for long."

"Of course," said the Professor thoughtfully, "people might be a bit surprised at the end that you were so tired."

"Tired?"

"Yes. You'd have played two or three hundred shots, though only fifty or sixty would count."

"No, I'd only have played fifty or sixty," Bert declared. "See what would happen. I'd make a bad shot, then go back and do it again. I wouldn't have to go for the ball. I'd be going back to *before* the shot was made—so even if I needed five thousand shots, I'd only have *played* fifty."

"But if that's so," argued the Professor, "they'd all be the same."

"No more than any two shots you take one after the other are the same. I'd know what I'd done the last time and I'd make any correction that was needed."

Some of them were a little lost, but most could see the idea, and they all had a great time imagining how they could do what they'd always wanted to do.

Even Harry Smith, the cynic, the pessimist, the unbeliever, joined in. "You could go back and live your life from twenty again."

"Why twenty?" the Professor objected. "Why not five and check on your whole education?"

"Why not zero and make sure you were born right?" asked Harper.

"Women, too," said Moir. "You could keep trying with a girl until you found the right technique. You'd know all about her and she wouldn't know a thing about you. You could . . ."

This line of discussion naturally kept them all interested for a long time.

"And then," Bert remarked, "if you met a girl too late—well, you could always go back and meet her before it was too late, couldn't you?"

HE straightened up, taking the weight off his arms for the first time since the discussion started. Martha had been mentioned several times — and he could never forget that nothing he could do could prevent her dying in five years. True, when that happened, he could put everything right back to when she was eighteen . . .

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But in spite of that, the thought that she would die at twenty-nine—that she would *always* die at twenty-nine—made him anxious to see her, to reassure himself. He hadn't seen her for two hours.

"Can you manage, Bill?" he asked.

No one saw anything funny in that, though Bill could probably do the entire work of the bar just as well in Bert's absence as he had been doing it in his presence. They were used to Bert.

So Bert went to make sure Martha was all right, to kiss her on the back of the neck, to call her by the names that only he and she knew, to reassure her and be reassured.

"Didn't think Bert had the brains to think out things like that," Smith observed. "Plain nonsense, of course. But all the same . . ."

"Granting the possibility of walking through time like that," said the Professor, "all the rest we've been talking about follows. You could have all the *money* you wanted, and beat anybody at any game, and at least give yourself the opportunity to rule the world, and all the rest of it. But there's another thing nobody's mentioned."

"What's that, Professor?" asked Harper.

"Time would stick. If anyone had this gift—well, he wouldn't live forever, but he wouldn't want to die, either. So he'd keep putting time back, over and over again. Every time he was in danger of dying, he'd snap time back. Time, henceforth, would be confined to the few years of this man's life."

"God, yes!" exclaimed Harper. "Never thought of that. But surely, sooner or later, he'd be in an accident and wouldn't be able to—"

"If he was careful, he could always have the fraction of a second he needed to snap time back a little. You see, he'd only have to put it far enough back for him to avoid the accident, and it might never happen that he didn't get the instant of time he needed. He could go on and on and on, and for the rest of us, it wouldn't be worthwhile planning the future — because there wouldn't be any future."

THE Professor and Harper were the only two in the company who really saw that point of view. At any rate, they were the only two who were really interested in it. And they took it in very different ways.

Harper laughed boisterously at the idea of the closed circuit in time, a few years repeating and repeating themselves *ad infinitum*. It was a cosmic joke.

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The Professor frowned, disturbed, anxious and worried at the very idea of such a circuit, stopping all progress, all development, cutting off the future, making everything futile and insignificant merely because one man, by a chance in untold billions, could walk in time . . . a man who, like all human beings, wanted to live forever.

They looked at each other, Harper laughing at the gargantuan joke of a universe stuck in a temporal closed circuit because of one man with a mighty gift, and the Professor stunned at the vast futility of it.

However, it was only an idea.

When Bert came back contentedly, having seen Martha and satisfied himself that she was all right and that she still loved him, the Brains were discussing Flying Saucers.

—J. T. McINTOSH

Forecast

Next month, you're getting two high-voltage novelets . . . and probably a third, though it's a little hard to tell in advance; depends on how well the editorial shoehorn works.

THE TUNNEL UNDER THE WORLD by Frederik Pohl does a thorough and startling job of disproving the traditional test to see if you are dreaming. Pinching just doesn't work. Surgical instruments are much better . . . but a mechanic's kit is best of all!

In Theodore Sturgeon's WHEN YOU'RE SMILING, there is a—no, the story can't be described except in terms of its own uncompromising realism and remarkable theme. You've never read science fiction like this before. It's a shock wave of terror—with a jolting, blinding conclusion. *It's Sturgeon!* If you think you can outguess him, just try. You may, if you're really shrewd, get all the facts . . . but you won't have the truth until it strikes like an unexpected slap that will leave handmarks on your mind for years to come.

Naturally, there will be a handsome batch of short stories, Willy Ley's FOR YOUR INFORMATION, the usual departments . . . and probably that third novelet, unless the lever snaps. All in all, the issue looks like a really handsome one. And have you seen page 117 of *this* issue?

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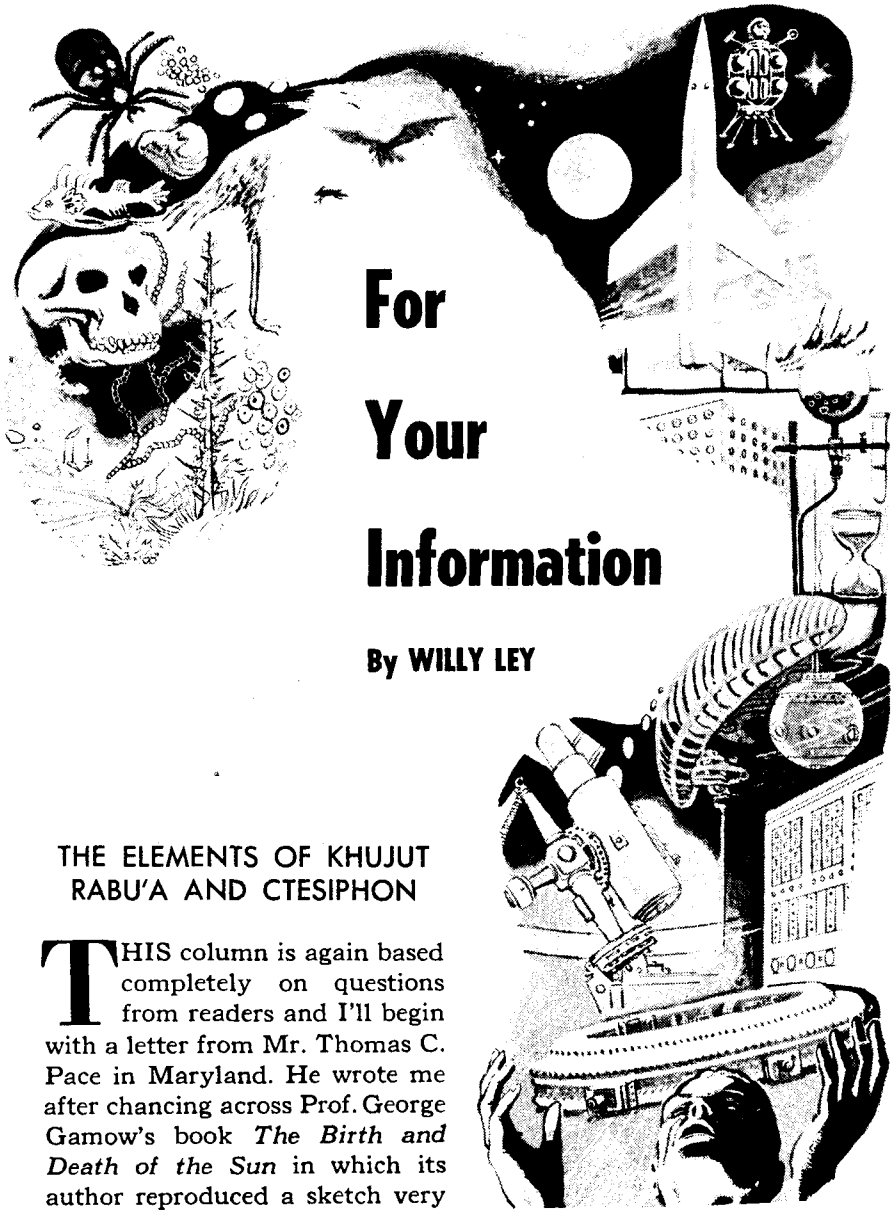

For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

THE ELEMENTS OF KHUJUT RABU'A AND CTESIPHON

THIS column is again based completely on questions from readers and I'll begin with a letter from Mr. Thomas C. Pace in Maryland. He wrote me after chancing across Prof. George Gamow's book *The Birth and Death of the Sun* in which its author reproduced a sketch very

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1 Photograph of the artifacts found at Khujut Rabu'a. Left to right, clay vase, iron core between fragments of asphaltum and copper cylinder. The indistinct scale is 10 centimeters long.

similar to Fig. 2 of a device from the time of Christ. This device is taken to be a primitive "galvanic" battery, surprising as that may seem. As a matter of fact, it couldn't be anything else known to Man!

My correspondent stated that he knew, of course, that the ancient Greeks were acquainted with some of the phenomena of static electricity, but that he had never heard anything about ancient batteries. He added that he thinks he should have heard about it, since he earned for himself a degree in Electrical Engineering. And he closed his letter with the question of how it was possible that such knowledge could become a "lost art."

That my correspondent had never heard about this is not at all surprising to me. This historical item is not yet recorded in the introductory sections of textbooks on electrical engineering. The reason is that the small amount of existing literature is rather scattered and the basic reports are of foreign origin. Consequently, it might be useful to write a reasonably comprehensive report on the Mesopotamian batteries of twenty centuries ago.

THE first publication I know of was written by a Mr. Wil-

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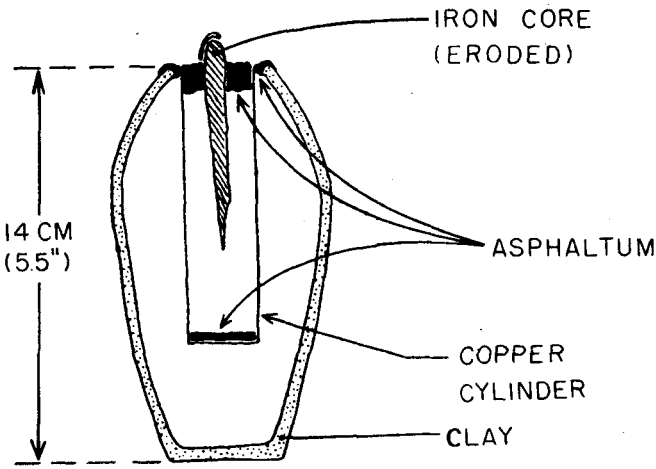
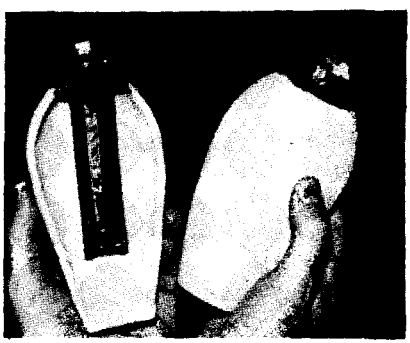


2 Diagram of the "element" as found.



3 Photograph of the reconstructed element.
Photograph by Berkshire Museum

helm König and appeared in the weekly magazine section of the daily newspaper of the German heavy industries, the *Deutsche Bergwerks-Zeitung,* under the date of January 16, 1938. König was attached to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, although he is not, by training, a scientist.

Soon after the date just mentioned, the climate of Iraq in general and of Baghdad in particular got too much for Mr. König and he went home to Germany, where he used his spare time to write a book under the title *Im verlorenen Paradies — Neun Jahre Irak,* or, in translation: *In the (area of) the Lost Paradise—Nine Years in Iraq.* It was published in Berlin in 1940 and copies of it can be found in American libraries.

In this book, he told the story of the discovery of the ancient battery which in itself sounds a little like fiction. Baghdad is at

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the Tigris river and, in 1936, the Tigris produced a major flood. The low-lying portions of Baghdad were covered by a few inches of water for a long time and these large and shallow puddles were extremely welcome to female mosquitoes as a place for depositing their eggs. Draining the puddles was apparently impossible and it was decided to fill them in. However, there are no hills in the immediate vicinity of Baghdad and the material needed had to be taken from a small hill a few miles to the southeast of the city. That hill bore the local name of Khujut Rabu'a and happened to be conveniently located at the railroad track which leads from Baghdad to Khanaqin.

As the workmen started loading their carts with sand and dirt from the hill, they came across ruins. Both the Iraq Museum and the government stepped in and their experts were unanimous in declaring that these were the remnants of a settlement from the time of the Parthian kingdom, which existed from 250 B.C. to 224 A.D.

I don't know what happened to the mosquito-breeding puddles in the poorer sections of Baghdad. They were probably left to evaporate. The digging at Khujut Rabu'a, however, turned into scientific excavations.

Among the artifacts found was a vase or urn of whitish-yellow burned clay of a well-known type, differing from the standard museum piece in that its neck had been knocked off a long time ago. In view of this handicap, the vase was shorter than usual, measuring 14 centimeters or 5.5 inches in height. Its largest diameter was 8 centimeters or about 3⅛ inch. The hole at the top measured 3.3 centimeters or slightly over 1¼ inch in diameter. There were traces of asphaltum all around the hole.

INSIDE the vase, the investigators found a cylinder of sheet copper, 26 millimeters (almost precisely one inch) in diameter and 9.8 centimeters (3⅞ inch) tall.

The cylinder had been formed by bending a piece of flat sheet copper around a dowel of some kind and soldering the ends together. The bottom of the cylinder was closed by a disc of sheet copper without soldering, the metal having been crimped to prevent the disc from falling through.

At the upper end, the copper cylinder was closed by a thick plug of asphaltum which, in its center, held a rod of iron, about three inches in overall length and sticking out on top about ⅜th of an inch (10 millimeters).

The iron rod was strongly oxi-

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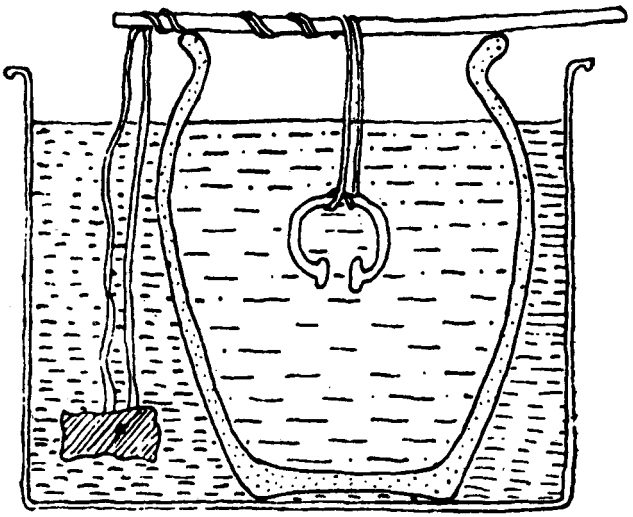

4 Konig's sketch of the ancient gold-plating equipment still in use in Baghdad a few centuries ago.

dized and tapered to a point at the time it was found. Quite possibly it was longer originally and it might have rested on the bottom of the copper cylinder, but without touching the metal, because there was a thin (3 millimeter) layer of asphaltum on top of the copper disc.

It was perhaps well that Wilhelm König was not a professional archeologist, for he looked at the find with open eyes and decided that this, records or not, could have been an electric element and nothing else.

He had the various components analyzed. The copper turned out to be rather pure with only traces of zinc, lead and iron. (The report on the analysis was published in *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, 1938, No. 1.)

He then inquired of archeologists whether anything like this had been mentioned in records; the answer was negative.

The next inquiry was whether anything like it had been found earlier. Yes, at a somewhat earlier date, four similar vases had been found near Tel' Omar, the ancient Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, some 25 miles downriver from Baghdad, lying opposite Ctesiphon on the other bank. The Tel' Omar speci-

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mens lacked the iron cores and the copper cylinders were closed at both ends and were found, on opening, to be full of plant fibers. Their discoverer, at a loss what to think about it, had tentatively concluded that the plant fibers had originally been writing material which had fallen apart after twenty centuries of drying. Next to the urns, one thin, almost wirelike bronze rod and three wirelike iron rods were found.

What gave the whole a special flavor was that these urns were not found in a grave, as the excavating archeologists more or less expected, but were lying among the ruins of a house that was well away from the other settlements. Moreover, they were associated with bowls that the experts proclaimed to have been magic paraphernalia. Obviously the separate building had been the warlock's house, where strange things went on.

BY the end of 1938, nothing of all this had been published in any language other than German and, since nobody had written up even the bare facts in English, I did so in the form of two short reports. One was published in this country in *Astounding*, the other in England in *Discovery*, both, by coincidence, in the March issues of 1939. Prof. Gamow's remarks in his own book must be based on one of these two pieces, which were both written and published before König's own book appeared in 1940, and which lack much detail I did not know until I read the book.

Wilhelm König, as has been mentioned, queried archeologists about similar finds. When he went home to Germany, he was shown an unexhibited find in a museum in Berlin. It had been made in the ruins of Ctesiphon and dated from a somewhat more recent period, the Sassanian kingdom which lasted from 224-651 A.D. The find consisted of three fairly large clay vessels. One of them contained ten copper cylinders, the second had ten iron rods and the third held ten asphaltum plugs with holes in the centers.

Ten elements ready for assembly, lacking only the clay urns which evidently could be bought from any potter in town.

One thing König apparently did not do was to find out how well a reconstruction of such a battery would work. This was done in this country as a direct result of my first article. Mr. Willard F. M. Gray, an electrical engineer at the General Electric plant in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, wrote to me to obtain all the information available for the purpose of building a replica of the ancient battery.

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The dimensions had been given by König and the composition of the metals, established analytically, was reasonably close to that of commercial sheet copper and iron rods of today, so there were no special difficulties as far as materials were concerned. The only unknown factor was the nature of the liquid electrolyte used by the "magicians" of the Parthian and Sassanian kingdoms. This simply was not known, but the choice was somewhat narrowed down to substances that could have been in use then.

Mr. Gray decided on a solution of copper sulphate as a likely electrolyte. He reported that this "worked quite well for a short time." The reconstructed battery is now on exhibit at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Mass.

Nobody who knows all the facts doubts that they did have "galvanic" batteries in Baghdad at about the time of Christ and for a few centuries thereafter. But when it comes to the question of what was done with them, we still have to resort to conjecture. Such a battery is rather weak and even if the "magicians" learned the trick of using several of them in conjunction, the output of current is small. Of course you can "taste" it and this might have played a rôle in what might be called magical experiments. Maybe it was even used for an assumed curative value, since somebody might have had the idea that the "taste" was similar to medicinal herbs.

AS for actual work, about the only thing you can do with such a weak current is the electroplating of small objects. Wilhelm König pointed out that some of the metal bowls from that time show what look like traces of plating. Moreover, he discovered that the silversmiths of Baghdad still used a primitive method of gold-plating (Fig. 4) earlier in this century. They did not know when this method had been introduced. They merely knew that it was "old" which, unfortunately, can mean anything that goes back prior to the birth of the speaker.

That these silversmiths used a primitive gold-plating method very much their own had probably been noticed by earlier travelers, but the obvious conclusion had been that they had imitated an early type of western device, lending it a local flavor by using home-made materials.

König rather suspects that their device goes back in an uninterrupted though devious line to the batteries of old Baghdad. This suspicion also answers Mr. Pace's question of how such knowledge could ever become a "lost art." It didn't. It merely failed to do

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the one thing we expect any useful device and invention to do—it did not spread.

That trade secrets stay confined to places or, sometimes, families and groups of families is not novel. The batteries of Baghdad merely represent an extreme case.

But there are two things we still would like to have to consider the case definitely proved. One would be a two-thousand-year-old artifact which has been both electro-plated and well-preserved. The other would be a remark in some manuscript that the artisans or magicians of Baghdad could change bronze to silver and silver to gold.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Looking back through the 1953 *calendar, I noticed something that bothers me. On the* 23*rd of December (as a "for instance," it seems to go this way all through the year), the Sun rose at* 6:59 *and set at* 4.59. *The next day, it rose at the same time, but set at* 5:00 P.M. *Can you explain why one time stays the same while the other jumps?*

Thom Perry
4040 *Calvert St.*
Lincoln 6, *Nebraska*

This is something that has once been called by an astronomer "The increase of the day during the afternoon only" and which has puzzled many people. The real reason is that the orbit of the Earth around the Sun is not a circle but an ellipse.

If it were a circle, this apparent discrepancy would not take place. Since it is an ellipse, the Earth moves somewhat faster along its orbital path when the northern hemisphere has winter because, at that season, the Earth is closest to the Sun. (The seasons are due not to the distance from the Sun but to the tilt of the Earth's axis and, of course, its equator.)

The time needed for the daily rotation of the Earth stays the same, but because the Earth moves a longer distance during this time interval, the movement of the Sun across the sky seems to be different.

If we adhered to the definition of "noon" as the instant the Sun is highest in the sky, we would be forced to have days of somewhat different length for the different seasons. A sun dial will indicate such "proper noons," but you cannot run industry on sun dials. Hence, if you compare the sun dial to "standard time," which makes the interval from midnight to midnight the same all year round, your sun dial will be "fast" some of the time and "slow" some of the time.

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To be specific, the sun dial will be "fast" from April 16 to June 15 (as much as four minutes in the middle of May) and "slow" from June 15 to September 2nd with a maximum of a little more than six minutes on July 27). From September 2nd until December 26, the sun dial will be "fast" (over 16 minutes on November 4) and "slow" from then on until April 16, the slowest day being February 12th, with some 14 minutes.

All of this simply means that the "noon" of standard time coincides with the noon of the sun dial only four times per year—on April 16, June 15, September 2nd and December 26. At all other times, the sun dial noon differs from standard noon and, during the first months of a year, the increase of daylight time is all added *after* the artificial standard noon. On a sun dial, equal time would be added before and after "noon," but, as has been said, you cannot run industry by sun dials.

In an old travel book, I found a statement about penguins living somewhere near Newfoundland. It cannot be a simple mistake, such as observation from a distance, because it is mentioned that the sailors collected the penguin eggs for food. I thought penguins lived only in the antarctic regions. Were there some in Newfoundland a few hundred years ago?

Karl F. Seifert
Emerson, Wisc.

Both you and the author of the old book you read are correct; it is a case of transfer of names. The bird now called "penguin" is restricted to the area of Antarctica with one species which, having once been subject to extreme wanderlust, settled on the Galápagos Islands directly under the equator.

The "penguins" of the Newfoundland area were not penguins in our sense. They were auks — specifically, the Great Auk (scientific name: *Alca impennis*), which attained the size of penguins, had wings too small to be useful for flight and bore a general resemblance to penguins in coloration.

The Great Auk originally inhabited the North European shores along the North Sea, Iceland, the southern tip of Greenland and the eastern shore of the North American continent from Labrador to about the coast of Virginia, with single specimens and small groups occurring as far south as northern Florida. It is now completely extinct, having lasted longest on a few small rocky islands off

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Cape Reykjanes, south of Iceland.

It was this Great Auk that was the original bearer of the name of "penguin," derived from "pen-gwyn", meaning "white head". The name referred to two blinding white spots on an otherwise nearly black head.

At the time this name was in use, the southern hemisphere penguins were still unknown. Sailors who were acquainted with the northern "pen-gwyn" simply transferred the name, much in the manner in which English settlers in North America began to call a North American thrush a "robin" because of the similar coloration of the feathers on its chest, even though the two birds are neither related nor even of the same size.

The great French naturalist, Count Buffon, was very much disturbed by such careless nomenclature and suggested that the southern penguins be called "manchots". But only a few learned men followed this suggestion and not for long.

However, the confusion is minor, not only because the Great Auk is now extinct, but because the two birds lived in different hemispheres. The Great Auk never got close to the Tropic of Cancer and the penguin—excepting the Galápagos variety — never reached the Tropic of Capricorn.

Could an explosion (like we've already had) cause the Earth to deviate from its course? If so, will the deviation be toward or away from the Sun and how soon could it be detected? Would it need months or years?

James A. Velazquez
Far Rockaway, N. Y.

Theoretically, any explosion will influence the course of the Earth to a small extent. The direction in which this influence is exerted would depend on the time of the day. In the movement of the Earth around the Sun, the front side is the "dawn side". Hence an explosion at dawn would retard the Earth slightly, while an explosion at dusk would accelerate it.

If the Earth were accelerated by an explosion at dusk, it would drift "outward" in the Solar System and take up a new orbit slightly farther away from the Sun. If decelerated by an explosion at dawn, the Earth would drift "inward" and take up a new orbit somewhat closer to the Sun.

But because of the enormous mass of the Earth, all this is just theoretical. Even if all the explosion of two World Wars and all atomic tests took place

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simultaneously, the result might very well be too small to be detected. Most likely it would amount to far less than the "perturbations" suffered by the Earth as a result of the gravitational pull of its two neighbors in the Solar System, Mars and Venus.

We are told that all motion will cease at absolute zero. Would the electrons around an atomic nucleus continue to revolve around it?

John F. Schenck
Rt. 1
Mexico, N. Y.

The statement that all motion will cease at absolute zero is meant to apply to molecular motion only. Nothing is said about the motion of sub-atomic particles.

I can understand to a certain extent how energy can be released in a fission bomb such as the A-Bomb, but how is it released in a fusion bomb? Please explain.

William E. West
Box 520
Madison, So. Dakota

In one respect, the two types of bombs may be said to be alike—in both cases, some matter is destroyed to appear as energy.

In the fission bomb, the heavy atoms of either uranium-235 or of plutonium are made to fall apart. They break up into two heavy atoms of roughly equal mass plus a number of smaller "splinters". The important point is that the total mass of the "splinters" of all sizes does not quite add up to the mass of the original atoms. The "missing mass" has been turned into energy.

In the fusion bomb, light atoms of individual masses smaller than "4" are made to reassemble into helium atoms. Again the resulting helium atoms do not quite have the mass of the atoms from which they were formed, the "surplus" being released as energy.

This question may not really belong in GALAXY, *but I wonder whether there is any truth in the legend of the vampires of Romania. If so, is there any connection between that legend and the vampire bats?*

Estelle Taylor
P.O. Box
Graymoor Village, N. Y.

The answer, offhand, would be "no," but there is a minor mystery, or perhaps just an interesting coincidence, connected with the vampire legend.

As far as one can tell, the vampire legend of various countries on the Balkan peninsula is

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quite old, though nobody has been able to pinpoint its age, for unfortunately the carbon-14 method cannot be applied to legends. When it came to the shape of the vampire, folklore imagined something like a large bat. This folklore impression was strong enough to force its way into scientific zoology.

When Central and South America became known, it was also learned that there were blood-sucking bats in the New World. A few enormous bats which had been caught and preserved were at once suspected to be the culprits (simply because of their size) and were catalogued as *Vampyrus Spectrum.*

Later, it turned out that this bat was a completely harmless fruit-eater and that the actual blood-sucking vampire was a small and insignificant bat which received the scientific name of *Desmodus rufus.* This was in about 1840.

When it became known among European zoologists that a blood-sucking bat was a reality, they naturally jumped to the conclusion that the legendary bat-shaped vampire of the Balkans was based on such a fact.

But to this day, nobody has turned up a southeast European bat with blood-sucking habits. No known species is even under suspicion.

The present version of the vampire legend, much used in fantasy, where the vampire has human shape and is "undead," seems to be fairly recent.

As you know, the vampire is supposed to be immortal and only subject to the compound accident of suspicious peasants, zealous country priests and sharpened stakes. On the other hand, everybody who dies because of a vampire is supposed to turn into one himself.

Now if you start the chain with just one vampire, you may assume that, during the first year of its activity, one victim dies. By the end of the year, you have two vampires. If they each make one haul per year, the vampire population doubles every year. At the end of the tenth year, you'll have 1,000 full-fledged vampires — under the assumption that two dozen of them succumbed to attrition by stakes. After 15 years, you'll have 32,000; after 20 years, over one million.

After half a century, everybody would be a vampire!

Having thus pulled a prop out from under a whole category of stories, I close this last column of the year with sinister glee.

—WILLY LEY

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Uncle Tom's Planet

By FINN O'DONNEVAN

Illustrated by BARTH

All up and down the whole galactic plantation, there were no old folks at home— until the Aingoes came along!

ONE must remember that, in its sixty years of political existence, the Galactic Council has succeeded almost completely in destroying the institution of slavery. This accomplishment becomes even more remarkable when one considers that the anti-slavery laws had to be made acceptable to the differing mores of eight hundred and two independent governments of the Confederation.

Because of this practical necessity, the Slavery Act was based not on birth equality, but on the more expedient doctrine of relative inferiority. Thus, the inferiority of an enslaved race, relative to its enslaver, must be proven. The Council has always found grounds, even in the most backward of races, for a grant of independence.

Indeed, there is only a single instance where all the Council's work has been in vain. This case, naturally, is an exceptional one. The Council unofficially approves *of this particular enslavement!*

Morally, this would seem indefensible; but a Galactic Council must take the long view. And

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when one considers the unusual benefits accruing from this particular enslavement . . .

Aspects of Confederation, de Mantset

THE men aboard Council Cutter 8432 thought their radar was having hallucinations. Forty-two pips! It was impossible. Even Bill Sims, the Council agent, didn't believe it when he ordered the pips intercepted.

But there was no doubt, once the speedy little cutter came into range. There were forty-two Delgen ships, spaced in regular order, running at close to top speed.

Sims stared at them thoughtfully. He was young and tall and his coloring marked him unmistakably as a native Earthman. This patrolling assignment was his first. He didn't want to make any mistakes.

Especially, he didn't want to make any mistakes with Delgens.

He told the radioman to relay full information to Council Headquarters, just in case. A fleet in space could be up to no good. Then he contacted the flagship of the fleet.

"This is Council Cutter 8432," he said. "I request permission to board you for a routine inspection."

"Certainly you can board us," the answer came promptly. "Inspect as much as you like, as long as we can maintain course."

That seemed reasonable — at the time—for a fleet burned a lot of fuel.

"Request granted," Sims said. "Please show a light at your entry port." He hesitated, then added, "The Galactic Council has been informed of this fleet movement."

"We were about to notify them ourselves. And this isn't a fleet. It's a rescue mission."

Sims exchanged a look with his radioman. Delgens weren't known as rescuers. Just the opposite, in fact.

During the first great expansion wave from Earth, a small, tough core of colonists had pushed forward until they found an ideal planet. The planet was Delge, in the extreme northeast quadrant of the Galaxy. And Delge was worth waiting for.

The Earthmen—now Delgens —thrived on the planet's perfect climate, its disease-free atmosphere, and grew rich on its fruitful soil. Adaptation and change came with startling speed, once Earth was left behind. But Delge was far off the mainstream and isolation can breed bad habits. Although the Delgens were physically splendid, they left something to be desired in the matter of ethics.

Delge, in common with a num-

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ber of other places, found that machinery was singularly unyielding in its demands. Curse a machine and it ignores you. Refuse it shelter and it rusts. Feed it too little lubrication and it burns out. Run it too fast and it founders. Starve it for fuel and it quits.

But slaves! Slaves can be worked under conditions that no machine would tolerate. Slaves eat what there is, sleep where they can. When one dies, the taskmaster doesn't suffer the deep monetary sadness he feels upon the demise of an expensive machine—for slaves beget more slaves, which is more than can be said of machinery.

Twice in ten years, Delge had violated the Slavery Act. Sims was thinking of this as he entered the Delgen flagship.

A PAIR of big guards led him to the Captain's quarters. The ship, with its massive construction and oversize appointments, made him feel puny and out of place. Captain Olche intensified this feeling. Olche was a normal enough Delgen, but his ruddy seven-foot bulk and his air of genial superiority made Sims feel insignificant and, accordingly, resentful. The Captain didn't appear to notice.

"I suppose you're interested in the cargo holds?" he asked.

"If you please."

"Of course." The Captain escorted Sims down a long corridor and opened a door.

Sims stepped in—and caught his breath.

The hold was packed with small and despondent-looking grayish-green creatures.

"Did you ever see a sorrier bunch?" the Captain asked, as though discussing an inferior herd of cattle. "They call themselves Aingoes."

At first, Sims thought they were stunted descendants of Earth. He quickly saw that he was mistaken. The Aingoes were non-humans, about four feet tall, skinny, with round alien heads and tiny, narrow bodies. They sat on the floor of the hold in complete and abnormal silence, as though all spirit had been drained out of them.

"Every ship is filled with the things," Captain Olche said. "I think we managed to remove every one of them from their scrubby little planet."

"For what purpose?" Sims asked.

The Captain raised both eyebrows. "Why, slavery, of course," he stated, as though it were the most natural thing in the Universe.

Sims looked at the Captain with amazement. Sims was new in the Council service. Like most

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agents, he had had personal experience with slavers. As a boy, he had seen Anderson's Apes working on Earth farms. The polite fiction was maintained that these mute, soft-eyed inhabitants of Anderson's Planet were merely clever beasts. But the Council scientists proved their rationality and eventually they were emancipated. Sims had known it all along, had played with the young ones—until they were punished for playing with him—and the ruling came too late to mitigate his hatred of their owners.

Sims had always thought that slavers were debased and furtive people, well aware of the wrong they were doing, but too greedy to stop. This Delgen, though, had a perfectly genuine conviction that slavery was the natural, inevitable condition for a whole species!

SIMS found this attitude disconcerting. He took a form out of his pocket and began to fill in the pertinent data.

The Captain watched for a while, then said, "We aren't breaking any law, so what's the point of acting as if we are?"

"You're violating the Slavery Act," Sims said with flat-voiced violence, forcing his hand, which wanted to make a fist, to write steadily and clearly.

The Captain shook his head. "Slavery is regulated by the relative-inferiority ruling. Examine these creatures more closely. You'll see right off that they're about as inferior as anything can get and stay alive. Sure, we know we'll have to get a court decision, but it's only a formality in this case."

Sims wanted to retort, but he made himself continue writing his report. Legally, slavery was possible; actually, nobody had ever been able to make inferiority stick. Tough, dedicated men, the Council agents stopped most attempts before they got started. Those that came to court were up against the equally dedicated thoroughness of Council scientists and the shrewd resourcefulness of Council lawyers.

Between them, the scientists and lawyers always won in court. They could prove every time that a tentacle was equal to a hand, disorganized functionality was every bit as good as a centralized nervous system, ten legs were more stable than two on rocky planets, rudimentary wings helped balance desert-runners, and a nose didn't have to be used for smelling—or even exist in the case of anerobic life-forms.

They could prove anything they had to prove. Not by trickery, but by proving that races intended for slavery were as well adapted to their environment as

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the would-be slavers were to theirs. If the life-forms were repulsive in human terms, as they sometimes were, the lawyers could be counted on to build up sympathy for them.

Knowing that no case had ever been lost, Sims relaxed and even let himself smile a little as he finished his report. The Delgens were making a bold move, but it didn't stand a chance. All precedent was against it, for there was no slavery in the entire Confederacy.

And meanwhile, the Delgen fleet was moving at close to top speed toward the planet Moira II.

"YOU imbecile!" Sims' Chief roared, three days later, when Sims reported in. "You moron! You complete and abysmal idiot! Didn't you learn anything in training school?"

Sims stood stiffly at attention. "I don't understand, sir. What have I done wrong?"

The Chief was an Earthman, like Sims, although from a different political subdivision of that venerable planet. Large, pale, fleshy, the Chief was famous for his relentless hatred of slavers.

"I'll tell you what you did wrong," the Chief said. "You didn't *think*. That can be fatal in the Service. You knew the Delgens were going to make a court fight out of this?"

"Yes, sir, and I reported—"

"You also knew, or should have known, how important it is for us to try our cases in friendly courts." The Chief opened a chart of the Northeast sector. "You intersected them here. You should have ordered them to Danton IV, which was not only the nearest Confederacy planet, but it's also strongly anti-slavery. Instead, you let them go into custody at Moira II."

"What's wrong with that?" Sims asked.

"Two years ago, we forcibly separated Moira II from their own little chattels, that's what's wrong."

"Oh," Sims said. "Oh, Lord!"

The Chief began to pace up and down the length of his small, cluttered office. "Not your fault. Someone at Headquarters should have told you. Well, it's not irreparable. All we need is an airtight case."

"That shouldn't be difficult. There is no such thing as an inferior race."

"They taught you that in school. Proving it is something else. All right, we might as well prepare a philosophical brief, to begin with."

He pressed two buttons on his desk. A stenographer hurried in, pad and pencil ready. She was followed by the interpreter, leading an Aingo.

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The Chief walked three complete circles around the sorry-looking little creature, frowning deeply.

"Take it away," he said to the interpreter. "What am I supposed to do with *this?* Take it away and bring me the biggest, fattest, happiest one you can find."

"This is the best of the bunch," the interpreter said apologetically. "That hangdog look is muscular configuration, not emotional. And they all stoop like that. The snuffling seems to be a hereditary rather than—"

"All right," the Chief cut in impatiently. "Let's get on with it. Ask him how he feels about being snatched off his planet."

THE interpreter questioned, they listened carefully to the Aingo's answering squeal. "He says he feels very grateful, sir."

The Chief looked surprised. "No indignation, eh?" He turned to the stenographer. "Put down, 'Peaceful, cooperative attitude. A genuine sign of moral sufficiency.' Now ask him why he's grateful."

"He says he's grateful because the Delgens made them stop fighting each other."

The Chief rubbed his bald head worriedly. "Do they fight often?"

"All the time," the interpreter replied sadly.

The Chief said to the stenographer, "Scratch that first out. Now write, 'Bold, combative attitude, well suited to face independently the problems of everyday existence."

Sims cleared his throat. "Ask him if many are killed when they fight."

"No one is ever killed," was the translation. "We don't fight very well."

The Chief gave Sims a look of sheer bafflement. "Scratch it out," he told the stenographer. "Ask the Aingo what it wants."

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Aha! Write, 'Desire to be left in peace, to continue all-important spiritual growth.' "

The Aingo squealed anxiously for several seconds.

"But they don't want to be left alone," the interpreter said. "It seems they get very lonely and nervous."

"Do they want to be slaves?"

The Aingo thought carefully before answering.

"They don't care," the interpreter said.

The Chief said to the stenographer, "Put down, 'Passive resistance, an almost saintly spirit of gentle reproach against the overbearing Delgens, the culmination of long years of—"

The Aingo squealed again.

"He says they might like being slaves," the interpreter explained. "He says the Delgens are

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strong and masterful, and strong and masterful people should rule weak and inferior people."

"He said that, did he?" the Chief roared.

"Yes, sir."

"Get him out of here! Get him out before I brain him! These damned people *want* to be slaves. They *deserve* to be slaves. But they aren't going to *be* slaves!"

The stenographer asked, "Shall I type any of this?"

"Throw it all out," the Chief said. "Sims, get the specialists to work. This case comes up pretty soon and we have to find some grounds for Aingo equality." He turned to the interpreter, who was standing near the door. "Get that damned spiritless animal out of here! I don't see what the Delgens want them for!"

The Aingo smiled as it was led out. It evidently enjoyed being shouted at.

SIMS was given the job of organizing the reports of the various specialists. Their findings were depressing.

Physically, the Aingoes seemed to be an error of nature. They had poor eyesight and defective hearing, faulty coordination and inferior musculature. Almost any disease could floor them, and did. They matured rapidly—if their habitual state of imbecility could be called maturity—and died rapidly. They should have had a life span of twenty to thirty years. Instead, the average Aingo was fortunate if he lived five.

Ecologically, the findings were all negative. On the one hand, the Aingoes seemed incapable of imposing even the most rudimentary civilization on even the gentlest planet. On the other hand, they were unable to exist either independently, symbiotically or parasitically, in a natural state.

Mentally, no test could be devised that would rate them above ingratiating imbecile. Their perceptions were slow. They had no true emotions except for a feeble antagonism toward their own kind. They had no ambition; that drive was replaced by a vague uneasiness and an evident desire to be taken care of.

They had nothing resembling morals or morality.

But Sims did discover what the Delgens wanted them for.

It seemed that the Aingoes could climb trees and therefore pick fruit in the great orchards of Delge.

"That's everything," Sims said, handing in the last of his reports.

The Chief scanned it briefly and dropped it on his desk.

"Is there anything we can use?" Sims asked.

"Not a thing," the Chief said. "We just don't have a case."

"If I hadn't let the Delgen fleet

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go to the planet Moira—"

"It wouldn't have made any difference. The law is still based on the relative-inferiority rulings. Any court, no matter how favorably disposed, would have to find against us."

But Sims couldn't forgive himself for the mistake he had made. Things *might* have been different on Danton IV.

He went over the whole situation again in his mind—the forty-two pips on the radar, the contact with the Delgen fleet, the talk with Captain Olche . . .

"Wait a minute!" Sims burst out. "Isn't there a law against removing an indigenous people from their planet for the purpose of exploitation?"

"There is," the Chief said. "But it's easily circumvented. If the Delgens left a sizable percentage of Aingoes on the planet as I assume they did—"

"They claimed they didn't!"

"Hmm. Let's see. The Delgens said that they *rescued* the Aingoes. Their statement implies that conditions on the Aingo planet were too dangerous to support life. If we can show otherwise, if we can prove unnatural interference—"

Sims stood up. "I'll leave right now."

"The court sits tomorrow," the Chief said. "I've asked for endocrine readings. That should stall them for a few days."

"I'll find something," Sims promised.

"You'd better," the Chief told him.

IN the Council Cutter, Sims arrived at LG 34232-2, the unnamed planet of the Aingoes. He took photographs and readings of the Aingo sun and atmosphere readings of the planet. He radioed this data back to Headquarters, then swung low over the planet, searching for signs of habitation.

The Aingo planet was smaller than Mars; it seemed to be almost entirely ocean, bordered by jungle areas. He found no intelligent life.

Sims conducted a painstaking search over the most temperate of the land masses. Still there was nothing to see except small, frightened animal and bird life.

The Delgens had removed every one of the Aingoes.

He landed the ship for a closer look at the planet. In the jungle, he found a profusion of animal and bird life and myriad insects. Nothing seemed particularly menacing. The vegetation was lush and varied; some of it, presumably, was edible.

He radioed the Chief. "This appears to be a completely livable planet," he reported. "A little hot and damp for comfort, but certainly not dangerous."

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"Have you found any signs of villages?" the Chief demanded.

"I'm still looking."

"Good. You may come across something. We'll need it, too. The court has ruled against any more physical evidence on the Aingoes. They say they've seen enough."

"Can you stall them any longer?"

"I couldn't stall them at all. The case has been running for only two days, but it's drawing to a close—against us. Still, the Council is hunting through all our data. They may pull something out of the hat."

"I'll let you know when I find something," Sims said, and signed off.

He slept aboard his ship, and the next morning began a search of the temperate zone at treetop level. He found nothing. The next day he was out again.

At noon, he spotted a little irregularity in the jungle, a patch less thick than the rest. He landed and went to it on foot.

IT was jungle, like all the rest. But the growth was sparser, the trees smaller, greener, less massive. The patch had a certain regularity which was out of place in the irregular and asymetrical jungle. Looking it over, Sims felt sure that civilization had been responsible for this growth, not nature.

He walked to the center and began to dig.

Half a foot down, he found shards of pottery and a shattered gourd. These fragments appeared of very recent origin.

Two feet down, he found a bronze fork.

Five feet down, he found a piece of shiny blue plastic. He stared at it for a long time.

Pottery, baked from clay, is a primitive skill. The production of bronze is not so simple. Tin and copper of some purity must be alloyed in the proper quantities. Bronze marks the beginnings of the science of metallurgy. And plastics are even more complex. Before you can make a bit of shiny blue plastic, you must have a genuine technology.

At some time in their history, the Aingoes had had this technology!

To judge by what he had found, they had retrogressed, sinking finally below the basic village stage. They had retreated from civilization. But perhaps the retreat had not been unaided.

Someone like the Delgens, plowing the Aingo villagers under, assisting the rapid jungle to hide any evidence of former glories or future promise.

The standby on the radio blared, and Sims hurried to answer it.

"Sims," the Chief said, "I want

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you off that planet at once."

"I can't leave yet," Sims protested. "I've found evidence of unnatural interference. It can't be refuted. It's absolutely—"

"I'm giving you a direct order. You are to leave immediately."

"But, Chief!" Sims cried. "The evidence—"

"We analyzed the data you sent on the Aingo sun. It's prenova, Sims, and radiating like a bomb! It can flash at any moment!"

"Then the Delgen rescue mission—"

"*W*as technically a rescue mission."

"And the case?"

"It closed a few hours ago. The Moira courts declared the Aingoes an inferior race, suitable for enslavement."

BACK at headquarters, Sims dumped all his evidence on the Chief's desk. "Look at it! We can appeal, can't we? Take the case to a higher court?"

"We aren't going to appeal," the Chief said.

"Rescuing a person doesn't give anyone a right to enslave him," Sims said angrily. "Now we've got something to base an appeal on."

"We aren't going to appeal. That's orders."

"Your orders?"

"Orders from the Council. They checked all the physical data on the Aingoes and decided not to fight the case any further."

Sims was so shocked, he sat down without being asked. "But why?" he demanded.

"Don't ask me," the Chief said gloomily.

"Do they think the Aingoes really should be enslaved, that it would be best, under the circumstances?"

"The Council isn't in the habit of explaining its decisions to its clerks, janitors, secretaries, or anybody else. Kindly stop asking me questions. You did a fine job, Sims. Now forget it."

"I resign," Sims said.

"I don't accept your resignation." The Chief glared angrily at him. "Do you think the Aingoes are the only race in the Galaxy? It's the others we've got to worry about, because there's *really* going to be trouble now. Get your ship checked out."

Sims saluted stiffly and hurried out to his ship.

A SWARM of journalists descended on Delge IV and a flood of books was written on the first authorized slavery in the Confederacy.

A steady stream of beautiful garden products continued to be shipped from Delge.

If there is one thing typical of would-be slavers, it is that they

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won't sit back and envy a successful slaver's good luck. All over the Confederacy, planets short of labor and without funds for machinery tried to turn the precedent into a rule, just as the Chief had predicted.

The courts were choked with cases. Sims, along with the other Council agents, was furiously busy tracking down evidence to break them.

"We can't let another Aingo case happen again," the Chief said. "If it does, we're sunk. I want every single one smashed . . . and smashed flat!"

It took trickery and sometimes bloodshed to get the evidence, but the agents brought it back. The Council scientists discovered and the Council lawyers proved example after example of drugging, hypnosis and memory-erasure on a mass scale.

The trick, of course, had been to make intended slave races as nearly like the Aingoes as possible. The counter-measure was to find out how it was done in each instance. Knowing what to look for, the scientists won every time, though a few cases looked hopeless right up to the last moment.

Sims was called back to Headquarters. He was exhausted, but the Chief and the others looked close to collapse. They were all haggard, edgy, worried.

"We can't go on like this," the Chief said. "The slavers know how busy we're kept, so they're increasing the pressure. We're bound to slip up sooner or later and then they'll have us."

"We could add more agents," said Sims, "hire more scientists and lawyers."

"Budget," the Chief replied wearily. "We don't have the money. You can't ask people to work for nothing."

"There are some who will."

The Chief looked unbelievingly at him. "Who, for instance?"

"People we helped escape slavery. Pick the smartest, train them—"

"I'm ahead of you," said the Chief, jumping to his feet. "And I've got just the man to take charge of the training program."

"You have? Who?"

"You," the Chief said.

"But I'm needed out in the field," Sims objected. "My sector is falling behind schedule."

"We all are. Get busy and maybe we can beat back this damned assault."

SIMS pushed through whole classes of agents; the races that had escaped enslavement were eager to cooperate and many of their representatives were bright as well as eager. Some were not, though, and they were added as brawn, which was needed more and more as the battle

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grew tougher and more audacious. The courts weren't choked any more; they were nearly drowned in the tidal wave of cases. Sims had no solution for this, nor did anyone else.

"That's the loophole they'll get us by," said the Chief gloomily. "We're through, or will be in a little while. I've been going on the principle that a good general never knows when he's licked, but I'd have to be a complete idiot not to recognize an absolutely hopeless situation when I see one. I'm just praying the Dark Ages don't last too long, once they descend on us."

It was then that a call came through from Delge. When the Chief took it, his face brightened and his back grew straight and proud again.

"Get a ship ready, Sims," he snapped out in his old brisk style. "There's a petition for a change of status on Delge."

Sims rocked back, astonished. "You mean those miserable Aingo runts are rioting?"

"Worse," the Chief grinned cheerfully.

Sims was baffled all the way to Delge.

Upon landing, they were met by a delegation of towering seven-foot Delgens. Even before they left the ship, the Delgens were shouting:

"—won't stand for it!"

"—no justice in the Galaxy!"

"—doublecrossed by the Council!"

Then a solitary Aingo appeared —simply appeared—out of the empty air. Physically, he was the same as Sims remembered, but as tall now as the Delgens and there was something almost overwhelming about his confident bearing.

"Quiet!" the Aingo ordered.

The Delgens instantly became silent.

"I beg forgiveness," the Aingo said diplomatically. "I should have had them penned before your arrival. They're such vociferous beasts—"

"*Penned?*" Sims repeated blankly.

"Of course. We keep the slaves penned when they aren't working. They taught us the practice when the situation was reversed."

"But I thought . . . What the hell has happened here?"

"I think your superior should explain that."

THE Chief was grinning satisfiedly. "You don't get it?"

"Am I supposed to?" Sims asked in confusion.

"No. The Council didn't, either, till the Aingoes radioed us for a change of status—"

"The *Aingoes* did?"

"Sure. Their race was going through a period of high muta-

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tional change. It began as a retrogression, a rapid sinking from civilization to savagery, as a result of the radiation from their prenova sun. The Delgens found them at the absolute null."

"And then the mutation reversed itself," Sims finished dazedly, "as soon as they were out of the radiation field. Well, there's no problem. We just get the court to throw out the slavery decision."

"It's not that simple," said the Chief. "The Aingoes want to enslave the Delgens now!"

"*What?*"

"All right, we made a mistake," a Delgen plucked up enough courage to protest. "But that's no reason to enslave *us*."

"You are an inferior race," the Aingo pointed out. "Can you transpose instantaneously? Can you grommich? Can you stel?"

The Delgen looked humiliated. "No, but still it's wrong to enslave us."

"*Wrong?* Oh, no question of it. But since it's in a good cause, you will remain slaves until we decide otherwise—if we ever do. Now back to your pens!"

The Aingo's voice was stern, but Sims detected a note of amusement in it, a hint of unvindictive humor.

"So that's the gag," he said wryly, after the Delgens were penned and the Aingo returned. "The Aingoes are in on this with us."

"Of course," grinned the Chief, enjoying it all. "They have no more use for slavery than the Council has. They just want to show what might happen to people who use the relative-inferiority rulings. Just like the Delgens now, they might find themselves trying to prove they're no such thing one day."

"And the Council will play along?"

"What do *you* think?"

Sims looked anxiously at the Aingo. He received something very much like a good-natured wink.

Smiling, Sims took a form out of his pocket and began to fill in the pertinent data.

". . . when one considers the unusual benefits accruing from this particular enslavement, one can only approve the Council's course. The Delgens, at this writing, have been twenty years fighting in the courts for their lost independence. This sorry state of affairs has given pause to the slave-minded. Indeed, the Aingo trick has done more to enforce the Slave Act than any conceivable number of Council Cutters might have done.

Aspects of Confederation,
de Mantset

—FINN O'DONNEVAN

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ASSIGNMENT'S END

By ROGER DEE

Illustrated by DOCKTOR

HE was just emerging for the hundredth time during the week from the frightening hallucination that had come to plague him, when Kitty Murchison came into his office.

"It's almost 15:00, Philip," she said.

When she had entered, her face had taken on the placid look that everyone wore — unwittingly, but

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inevitably—the instant they came near Alcorn.

Finding Kitty's cool blonde loveliness projected so abruptly against the bleak polar plain of his waking dream, he knew how much more she was than either fiancee or secretary alone. She was a beacon of reassurance in a sea of uncertainty.

"Thanks, darling," he said, and looked at his watch. "I'd have woolgathered past my appointment and it's an important one."

He stood up. Kitty came closer and put both hands on his shoulders.

"You've had another of those dreams, haven't you? I wish you'd see a—a doctor about them."

He laughed, and if the sound rang hollow, she seemed not to notice.

"That's why I asked you to call me. I've made an appointment with one."

SHE stood on tiptoe to kiss him. "I'm glad you're decided. You haven't been yourself at all for a week, Philip, and I couldn't *bear* a honeymoon with a preoccupied husband!"

He managed the appropriate leer, though he had never felt less like it. The apprehension that followed his daytime chimera was on him again, so strongly that what he wanted most to do was to take Kitty's hand tightly, like a frightened child, and run headlong until he was beyond reach of whatever it was that threatened him.

"Small chance," he said, instead. "Any man who'd dream away a honeymoon with you is dead already."

She sighed placidly and turned back to the business at hand. "You won't be late for your 16:00 conference with our Mr. O'Donnell and Director Mulhall of Irradiated Foods, will you? Poor Sean would be lost without you."

He felt the usual nagging dissatisfaction with the peculiar talent that had put him where he was in Consolidated Advertising. "He'd probably lose this case without my soothing presence and CA would pay its first ungrounded refund claim in—" he counted back over the time he had been with Consolidated—"four years and eight months."

Kitty said wistfully, "Shall I see you tonight, Philip?"

He frowned, searching for a way to ease the hurt she would feel later, and finding none. "That depends on the psychiatrist. If he can't help me, I may fly up to my cabin in the Catskills and wrestle this thing out for myself."

Kitty moved to go, and then turned back. "I almost forgot. There was a call for you at noon from a secretary of Victor Jaffers'

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at Carter International. She seemed to know you'd be out and said that Mr. Jaffers would call again at 15:00."

"Victor Jaffers?" Alcorn repeated. The name added a further premonitory depression. "I think I know what he wants. It's happened before."

When Kitty had gone, Alcorn took a restless turn about the room and was interrupted at once by the gentle buzzing of the radophone unit on his desk. He pressed the receiving stud and found himself facing Victor Jaffers' image.

"Don't bother to record this," Jaffers said without preamble. "Complete arrangements have already been made to prove that I've never spoken to you in my life."

JAFFERS was a small, still-faced man who might have been mistaken for a senior accountant's clerk—until the chill force of his eyes made itself felt. Alcorn had seen the Carter International head before only in teleprint pictures, had heard and discounted the stories about the man's studied ruthlessness. But those eyes and the blunt approach made him wonder.

"I've got a place in the contact branch of my organization for your particular talent, Alcorn," Jaffers said flatly. "It will pay you five times what you earn with Consolidated. You understand why I'm taking you on."

"I know." The arrogance wearied rather than angered Alcorn. "I have a gift for arranging fair settlements when both principals are present. Mr. Jaffers, I've never exploited my gift for personal profit. That's a matter of self-protection as well as ethics—I don't like trouble." He reached for the canceling stud to end the interview. "Others have made the same offer before you and there'll be others again. But I won't use my ability unfairly."

Jaffers smiled, unamused. "You do go straight to the point, which saves argument. But you'll work for me, Alcorn. Those others made the mistake of talking to you personally. I know that you can be reached as easily as any other man if my agents keep more than fifty feet away from you." His eyes moved past Alcorn to the window. "Look at the window across the street."

Alcorn, turning, felt his neck prickle. Across the narrow canyon of street, without pretense at concealing himself, a man in gray clothing watched him from an open office window.

"I've had you under surveillance for days," Jeffers' voice said behind him. "I've located two others of your sort since my statisticians brought their existence

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to my attention, but somehow they slipped through my fingers this week. I'm taking no chances on you."

Alcorn whirled back incredulously. "You've found others? Where and—"

"I'll tell you that when you're on my payroll."

"It's a trick," Alcorn said angrily. "I searched for years before I settled down with Consolidated and I didn't find a trace of anybody like myself. I don't believe there are any."

"Most of them covered themselves better." Jaffers added, with cold finality, "I don't haggle, Alcorn. You'll work for me or for no one."

"THE trouble is," Alcorn said, "that I'm different from other people and I have to know why. I know *how* I'm different, but if I knew *why*, I'd never have come to a psychiatrist."

Dr. Hagen rattled the data sheet in his hands and blinked behind his pince-nez like a friendly beagle. He was a very puzzled man, being accustomed to analyzing his own reactions as well as those of his patients. Alcorn could see him struggling to account for the sudden serenity that had come over him the instant Alcorn entered the office—certainly it was not the doctor's usual frame of mind, from the first sour look of him—and failing.

"Different in what way, Mr. Alcorn?"

"I soothe people," Alcorn said. "There's something about me that inspires trust and an eagerness to please. Everyone roughly within a radius of fifty feet—I've checked the limit a thousand times—immediately feels a sort of euphoria. They're as happy as so many children at a picnic and they can't do enough for me or for each other."

Dr. Hagen blinked, but not with disbelief.

"It affects psychiatrists, too," Alcorn went on. "You'd cheerfully waive the fee for this consultation if I asked it, or lend me fifty credits if I were strapped. The point is that people are never difficult when I'm around, because I was born with the unlikely gift of making them happy. That gift is the most valuable asset I own, but I've never understood it—and as long as I don't understand it, there's the chance that it may be a mixed blessing. I think it's backfired on me already in one fashion and possibly in another."

He shook out a cigarette and the psychiatrist obligingly held a lighter to it. Dr. Hagen, Alcorn thought, must normally have been an exceptionally strong-willed man, for he hesitated no-

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ticeably before he spun the wheel.

"Actually," Alcorn said, "I've begun to worry about my sanity and I'm afraid my gift is responsible. For the past week, I've had a recurrent hallucination, a sort of waking nightmare that comes just when I least expect it and leaves me completely unstrung. It's worse than recurrent — it's progressive, and each new seizure leaves me a little closer to something that I'm desperately afraid to face."

The psychiatrist made a judicious tent of his fingers. "Obviously you are an intelligent and conscientious man, Mr. Alcorn,

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else you would not have contented yourself with your comparatively minor job. But your profession as claims adjustor must impose a considerable strain upon your nervous organization. Add to this that you are a bachelor at the age of thirty-three and the natural conclusion—"

IN spite of his mood, Alcorn laughed. "Wrong tack — remember my gift! Besides, I'm engaged to be married next month and I'm quite happy with the prospect. This trouble of mine is something entirely different. It's tied in somehow with my talent for soothing and it scares me."

He could have added that Jaffers' hardly veiled threat on his life disturbed him as well, but saw no point in wasting time on the one danger he understood perfectly.

"This vision," Alcorn said, "and the sensory sharpness and conviction of disaster that come with it—it's no ordinary hallucination. It's as real as my peculiar talent and represents a very real danger. It's working some sort of change in me that I don't like and I've got to find out what that change is or I'm done for. I *feel* that."

Obligingly, the psychiatrist said, "Describe your experience."

Talking about it made perspiration stand out on Alcorn's forehead. "First I'm seized with a sudden sense of abnormally sharpened perception, as if I were on the point of becoming aware of a great many things beyond my immediate awareness. I can feel the emotions of people about me and I have the conviction that, in another moment, I shall be able to feel their thoughts as well.

"Then I seem to be standing alone on a frozen arctic plain, a polar wasteland that should be utterly deserted, but isn't. I've no actual sensations of touch or hearing, yet the scene is visually sharp in every detail.

"There's a small village of corrugated sheet-metal houses just ahead, the sort that engineers on location might raise, and the streets between are packed with snow. Machines loaded with metal boxes crawl up and down those streets, but I've never seen their drivers. Until this morning, I never saw any people at all on the plain."

Dr. Hagen rattled his paper and nodded agreeably. "Go on. What are these people like?"

"I can't tell you that," Alcorn said, "because their images were not complete. There seems to be a sort of relationship between them and myself—a threatening one—but I can't guess what it may be. I can't even tell you what racial type they belong to, because they have no faces."

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HE crushed out his cigarette and took a deep breath, getting to the worst of it. "I have a distinct conviction during each of these seizures that the people I see are not ordinary human beings, that they're as different from me as I am from everyone else, though not in the same way. It's the difference that makes me uneasy. I can feel the urgency and the resolution in them, as if they were determined to do—or had resigned themselves to doing—something desperately important. And then I know somehow that each of them has made some kind of decision recently, a decision that is responsible for his being what he is and where he is, and that I'll have to make a similar one when the time comes. And the worst of it is that I know no matter which way my choice falls, I'm going to be hideously unhappy."

The psychiatrist asked tranquilly, "You can't guess what choice it is that you must make, or its alternative?"

"I can't. And that's the hell of it—not knowing."

The icy chill of the polar plain touched him and with it came a deeper cold that had not been a part of the dream. At that instant, he might have identified its source, but was afraid to.

"My fear has some relation to whatever it is these people are about to do," he said. "I just realized that. But that doesn't help, because I've no idea what it is."

He glanced at his strap watch, and the time made him stand up before the little psychiatrist could speak again. The hour was 15:57, and he saw in dismay that his 16:00 appointment with Sean O'Donnell and the Irradiated Foods tycoon would be late.

"I don't expect an immediate opinion," he said. "You couldn't reach one as long as I'm here. Add up what I've told you, and if it makes any sort of sense you can radophone me tonight at 19:00. If my apartment doesn't answer, relay the call to my cabin in the Catskills—I've kept the location a secret, for privacy's sake, but the number is on alternate listing."

He paused briefly at the door, touched with an uncharacteristic flash of sour humor. "And telestat your bill to me. If I asked for it now, you'd probably charge nothing."

THE mood vanished as soon as he was outside and saw the gray-suited Jaffers operative waiting with stolid patience on the ramp of a department store across the street.

The shock of reminder brought on a giddy recurrence of his hallucination.

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The polar plain yawned before him. The silent machines crept over their snow-packed ways, the faceless people stood in frozen groups.

He emerged from the seizure, shaken and sweating, to find that the Jaffers man had crossed the street and was waiting a safe distance behind. Alcorn fought down a panic desire to run away blindly only because Kitty would be waiting for him at Consolidated —Kitty, his bulwark of reassurance.

The gray-suited man was a deliberate hundred feet behind him when he boarded a tube-car.

Kitty was not in his office and there was no time to ring for her.

Instead, he went through the long accounting room beyond, answering automatically the smiles of a suddenly genial staff and headed for O'Donnell's office.

He saw at once that he was too late.

The CA manager's door was open and O'Donnell and Mulhall of Irradiated Foods were emerging. Both wore street jackets and both men had the unmistakable air of euphoric calm that came within seconds of Alcorn's approach.

O'Donnell gave Alcorn his familiar long-lipped grin, looking, with his thin gentle face and neat brush of ermine-white hair, like an aristocratic Irish saint.

"You missed a pleasant meeting," O'Donnell said. "I've just signed a refund release to Charlie here, and a pleasure it was."

The awareness that they had been calmed before he'd arrived left Alcorn speechless.

"Really shouldn't have accepted," Mulhall said sheepishly. Mulhall was a big, solid man, bald and paunchy and, when his normal instincts were controlled, an argumentative tyrant. "Niggling technicality, I say. Shouldn't have taken a refund, but Sean here insisted."

They laughed together, like children sharing a joke.

"The claim was justified," O'Donnell said firmly. "Once Charlie's secretary explained the case, there was no doubt."

Mulhall grinned at Alcorn. "Remarkable girl, Janice Wynn. She's waiting in Sean's office. Wants to meet you, Philip."

They went toward the lift with their arms about each other, sharing an all-too-brief moment of companionship.

ALCORN hesitated in front of the closed door of O'Donnell's office.

When he entered, Janice Wynn was standing at the window, watching the soundless rush of traffic in the street below. She was dark, not pretty in any conventional sense, but charged with

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a controlled vitality that made physical beauty unimportant.

Her face was anything but serene, the complex of emotions in her tilted green eyes far removed from the ready placidity he had learned to expect. There was an unmistakable impression of driving urgency—the same urgency, Alcorn thought, that he had felt in the people of his waking dream.

"You're one," he said. His face felt stiff. "After all these years, I've found another one like—"

"Like yourself," she said. "But it's I who have found *you*. Did you really think you were unique, Philip Alcorn?"

He tried to answer and couldn't. The meeting he had dreamed of all his life had come about with precisely the electric suddenness he had imagined, but he felt none of the elation he had anticipated. He felt, instead, a sudden panic.

For behind Mulhall's secretary, he had a shutter-swift glimpse of the frozen plain, starkly clear with its huddle of metal buildings and its faceless people clustered on the snow-packed street.

JANICE Wynn gave him no time to flounder for control.

"You're the last," she said. "And the most stubborn of the lot. you're lucky that we could find you in the little time we have left."

Alcorn said hoarsely, "I don't know what you mean."

She looked more disappointed than surprised. "You've no inkling *yet*? I've known most of the truth for days, though I still haven't made the change. Your conditioning must have been too thorough or—"

She caught the shift of Alcorn's glance toward the window and turned quickly. The man in gray was watching them intently from the office across the street.

"You're under surveillance!" she said sharply. "By whom and for how long?"

He told her of Jaffers' call, and winced at the sudden dismay in her face.

"At best you've killed an inoffensive psychiatrist with your problem," she said. "At worst—" She came around O'Donnell's desk toward him, her manner abruptly decisive. "We've less time than I hoped. Come out of here, quickly."

In the corridor, she opened her handbag and took out a thick white envelope. "There's no time now for explanations. The clippings will give you an idea of what you're up against. Lose your spy if you can and don't go near your apartment. I'll be at your cabin tonight at 21:00. You'll learn the rest then."

She pressed a stud at the elevator bank and chose an as-

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cending lift. Alcorn realized that there would be a turbo-copter waiting for her on the roof.

She faced Philip before entering the cage. "You have no chance at all except with us. Remember that, or you'll regret it for the rest of your *very* short life."

Alcorn made no attempt to follow.

". . . except with us," Janice Wynn had said.

Us?

She was like himself, gifted with his own talent. She was connected somehow with the faceless people of his hallucinations.

Who were they, and where were they, and what did they want of him?

HE was still groping for the answers when Kitty came toward him. She gave a little cry of dismay when she saw his face.

"You look simply awful, Philip! Is it another of your—"

With Kitty's arrival, Alcorn's premonition of disaster returned. Something was going to happen to him, *was* happening to him, and unless he moved carefully, it could involve Kitty as well. He had to keep Kitty out of this, which meant that he must stay clear of her until he was safe.

"It's nothing," he said hastily. "I'll call you later, Kitty. I've another appointment now that can't wait."

She put out a hesitant hand. "Philip . . ."

He wanted desperately to tell her the whole improbable story, to reveal his fears and get the reassurance she was able to give him.

But he couldn't risk involving Kitty in any danger.

"It's nothing," he repeated. He went down the lift quickly because he knew that if he delayed to comfort her, he would never have the courage to go at all.

His only clear thought, as he shouldered his way into the late-afternoon throng outside CA, had been to escape from Kitty and from the too-vivid memory of Janice Wynn. Now that he must choose a course, he was brought up short by the fact that, so long as he was tailed by Jaffers' men, there was literally no place for him to go.

He could not go to his apartment because of Jaffers' surveillance. He had no intention of meeting Janice Wynn at his Catskill cabin at 21:00. Her obvious knowledge—and, therefore, *theirs*—of the location ruled that out as a refuge.

He looked about for the inevitable man in gray and found him following at his careful hundred feet. The crowd caught and bore them both along like chips in a millrace, keeping the interval constant.

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ALCORN let himself be carried along, feeling the slow release of tension that spread outward from him through the throng. The physical pressure was also eased. People slowed their dogged pace and smiled at utter strangers.

He had wondered often how the people affected by his circle of calm accounted for their sudden change of mood. He had dreamed that one day he might walk in such a crowd and enter another island of serenity like his own and thus find another human being gifted like himself. Someone with his own needs and longings, who would not melt into ready complaisance when he drew near, but who would speak honestly and clearly, who would understand how he felt and why.

Ironically, when that moment had come in O'Donnell's office, it hadn't brought him the fulfillment he had expected. It had left, instead, a panic beyond belief.

Why? What was he afraid of?

There was nothing evil or dangerous in his own gift—why should he fear another possessing the same wild talent? Damn it, he thought, what sort of fate could be so terrible that its foreshadowing alone could throw him into such an anxious state?

How could he be sure that the faceless people were hostile? If they were like Janice Wynn, and if Janice were like himself, it might follow naturally that—

The rustle of the envelope in his pocket was like an answer, proving that his problem, if nothing else, was real.

". . . for the rest of your *very* short life," she had said.

THE sudden sharpening of awareness that preceded a new seizure rasped him again. He felt the tranquillity about him, and then the arctic montage swallowed it all, and once again he stood bodiless on the snow-packed streets of the metal village.

The faceless people moved purposefully now, and beyond them loomed the towering bulk of scaffolding erected about the pit where the great bronze cylinder of a ship lay . . .

Pit?

Scaffolding?

Ship?

He stopped so abruptly that a man behind him stumbled and regained balance only by clutching Alcorn's shoulder.

"Sorry," the man murmured, and moved on.

The mirage vanished; the crowd behind pushed on, parting politely about Alcorn. The mass farther back surged restlessly, hurrying, grumbling like an impatient corporate organism. The Jaffers agent, caught in the press, was borne helplessly nearer.

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Alcorn realized his opportunity and stood fast, waiting while the tide of bodies flowed past. The man in gray saw his intention and struggled frantically to break free of the pinioning crowd.

He failed.

A sort of grim satisfaction fell upon Alcorn when the man's face lost its urgency and settled into smiling unconcern. The gift *was* a weapon of sorts. The way to escape—at least from Jaffers' surveillance—was open.

He fell in beside the spy, paying less attention now to the man himself than to the matter of disposing of him. The garish facade of a nearby joy-bar solved his problem.

"Come with me," Alcorn ordered.

THE joy-bar was less than half full at this early hour, but noisy enough for midnight. A concealed battery of robotics ground out a brassy blare of music, integrating random pitches —selected by electronic servo-computers—into the jarring minor cacophony that had become the latest rage.

The early patrons were intently watching the long telescreen above the bar when Alcorn came in. A quarterstaff bout—a frantic, bloody sport revived from God only knew how many centuries before—was in progress there, matching a heavily muscled Nordic with a sandy bristle of hair against a swarthy, hairless Eurasian. The Nordic, from his twisted stance, had a couple of broken ribs already; the Eurasian's right ear dangled redly.

Alcorn seated himself opposite Jaffers' operative in an isolated booth and fed the coin-slot for drinks.

"Drink," he said grimly. "You're going to be drunker, my friend, than you've ever been in your inquisitive life."

The uproar died out before the drinks arrived. Only, the blaring music machines and the blood-roar of the telescreen remained, and a suddenly placid bartender turned both down to a murmur.

The rest was routine to Philip Alcorn's experience. Men at the bar turned to each other like old friends, forgetting submerged frustrations as readily as they forgot the vicious slash-and-parry on the screen. The place drowsed in a slow and comfortable silence.

The Jaffers man tossed off his drink and dialed another. Alcorn, raising his own, remembered Janice Wynn's letter in his pocket and set the glass down, untasted.

The clippings, she had said, would give him an idea of what he was up against.

His hands shook so violently when he ripped open the envelope that he almost dropped it.

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EIGHT clippings were inside, small teleprinted scissorings from digest newssheets that were available at any street-corner dispenser. He read them quickly, and was more puzzled than before until he realized that they fell into two general groups of interlocking similarities.

Four were accounts of unexplained disappearances. A moderately successful research chemist named Ellis had vanished from the offices of his New York chemical firm; a neighborhood pharmacist in Minneapolis, a spinster tea-shop proprietress in Atlanta and a female social worker in Los Angeles had disappeared with equal thoroughness, completely baffling the efforts of police to find them.

None of these people had been of more than minor importance, even in his own immediate circle. Alcorn felt that these events had been reported only because the efficiency of missing-persons bureaus made permanent disappearance next to impossible. Even so, only one clipping—that on Ellis, the New York chemist—bothered to run a photograph.

The other four accounts dealt with violent deaths, all rising from sudden outbreaks of mob hysteria. Two of the victims had been small-town clergymen, a profession which made their lynchings as startling as they were inexplicable; both had been respected members of their little communities until the day—the date was less than a week old—their congregations rose up en masse and tore them limb from limb.

The remaining two of the second group had died in different fashions. A doctor in a Nevada mining hamlet, making a late call, had been set upon by the patient's family, knocked unconscious and shot. A Girl Scout leader in Mississippi had been thrown over a cliff by her young charges.

A MORBID and pointless collection of horrors, Alcorn thought, until he saw the parallel that related them.

The circumstances were strikingly similar in every case except that the four who disappeared were urbanites, while the murdered ones were all members of small and comparatively isolated communities. Not one of the eight had been over thirty-five; each had been well-liked; none was wealthy, yet all were in comfortable circumstances from vocations that depended upon good will.

A further similarity built up in Alcorn's subconscious, but died unconsidered because at that moment the quarterstaff bout on the screen ended and a brazen-voiced announcer gave the time.

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It was 18:30. Dr. Hagen was to call him at his apartment at 19:00.

Alcorn, mulling over the cryptic half-knowledge gained from the clippings, wondered what the little psychiatrist might make of it. Hagen was capable in his field; even with so little to work on, he might possibly come up with the right answer.

Alcorn decided that he could not run from a danger until he knew what the hazard was. He might as well face the issue squarely now and be done with it.

The Jaffers operative, on his ninth drink, had relaxed into a smiling stupor. Alcorn left him snoring in the booth and headed for the public radophone unit beyond the end of the bar. He could not be in his apartment to take Dr. Hagen's call, but he could anticipate it.

The telescreen announcer's voice stopped him short. "*Have you seen this man? Sought by police for the murder earlier this evening of Dr. Bernard Hagen, prominent psychiatrist, he is thought to be at large somewhere in downtown . . .*"

The screen showed an enlarged full-face photograph of Alcorn.

HE was responsible for Hagen's death. But who had wanted the knowledge of Alcorn's gift—or the suppression of that knowledge—badly enough to kill the psychiatrist for it?

Jaffers, or the faceless people behind Janice Wynn?

It had to be Jaffers, he decided, eliminating a possible source of opposition and at the same stroke placing himself still further on the defensive.

Slowly, he became aware that the joy-bar had fallen quiet, that everyone in the place was watching him with a sort of intent sympathy. The bartender left his place and came toward him, his heavy face a study in concern.

"We know you couldn't have done it," the man said. The sway of Alcorn's presence held him hypnotized. "Can we help?"

Alcorn's only thought was of flight. "Have you a turbo-copter?"

"On the roof," the bartender said. "It's yours."

Alcorn took him along to unlock the controls. On the roof landing, a cool evening wind was blowing. There was a dim thin sickle of moon and a pale haze of stars, a wraithlike scattering of small white clouds that drifted in the reflected spectrum of the city's multicolored glow.

He sat in the turbo-copter with a feeling of incredulous unreality. The vast and shining breadth of the city was spread about him like a monstrous alien puzzle, a light-shot maze without meaning.

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Where, in that suddenly foreign tangle, could he go?

He set the 'copter off at random, knowing that its owner would have the police on his heels the moment he recovered volition. Alcorn was still trying to settle upon a course when a seizure fell upon him again.

First he had seen the city as something alien; now he felt it, a clamorous surf-roar of conflicting individual emotions, an unresolved ant-hill scurrying of hates and hopes and endless frustrations.

Then he was on the polar plain. The pit and scaffolding were the same, but the enigmatic groupings of people on the streets had changed. Four of them had faces now. Three were unfamiliar, but the fourth he recognized as Ellis, the research chemist who had disappeared from his laboratory in New York City.

BY the time Alcorn was composed, he discovered that he had chosen a course without conscious intent. Dark, open country fled past beneath, pricked here and there with racing points of light that marked the main artery of northward surface traffic. Familiar mountain shapes loomed ahead, indicating where he was bound.

He was heading, lemminglike, for his cabin in the Catskills.

The knowledge made him wonder if he could trust the instinct that had decided him. Jaffers might or might not know of the cabin; certainly Janice Wynn knew, for she had said she would pick him up there at 21:00.

Kitty, when he failed to call her as he had promised, would know at once where he had gone, and would either radophone him or come to him quickly.

He frowned unhappily over the possibilities, caught between an eagerness to see Kitty and a dread of having her involved in his trouble. He considered taking Kitty and fleeing in his borrowed turbo-copter to some isolated place where the two of them might make a fresh start, and gave up the idea at once as worse than impractical.

Jaffers would find him without difficulty, now that he knew what to look for. And there was the progressive reality of his visions —for he had ceased to think of them any more as hallucinations. The coming of Janice Wynn and the inexorable sharpening of his awareness proved that reality beyond doubt.

He found the twin-notched peak that landmarked his cabin. The cool of night and the mountain quiet, when he climbed out, were a tonic to his abraded nerves. There was a nostalgic calling of night-birds, the clean breath of

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pines and, from some tangled rocky slope, the faint pervading perfume of wild honeysuckle.

He had not guessed how sharp his awareness had become until he realized that someone was waiting for him inside the cabin.

HE halted outside, feeling like a man just recovering vision after a long blindness. Janice Wynn was in the cabin and she was alone. He knew that as certainly as if he had seen her walk in.

When he went in, she was standing before the wide cold mouth of the cabin's fireplace. She wore the same quiet suit she had worn in O'Donnell's office, and her tilted green eyes were at once relieved and anxious.

"I was afraid you might have lost your head and run away," she said. "It's good you didn't. There wouldn't have been time to find you again—the change is too close on us both."

"Change?"

She gave him a disappointed look. "I thought you'd have guessed by now the relation between ourselves and those people in the clippings. You had another seizure in the 'copter, didn't you?"

He stared, too disconcerted to answer.

"You saw four faces this time," she went on, "where you had seen none before. And you recognized one."

"It was Ellis, the chemist," Alcorn said. And with a numb premonition of the truth, he quietly asked, "How did you know that?"

"You were broadcasting it like a beacon. We're both in the last stages of the change. Now that our conditioning is lifting, we're reverting to our original telepathic nature. That's how *they* found you and me, as they found Ellis and the others—by tracking down our communication auras."

He said slowly, "Those four—why were they mobbed and killed?"

"Because the change caught them too suddenly for escape," she said. "And because, in our natural state, we are incompatible with Man."

"With Man," he repeated. "And what does that make us? Supermen or monsters?"

"You're still blinded by your conditioning," she answered, "or you'd see that we're neither, that we're not even native to this planet. I don't know a great deal more than that myself—I haven't remembered it all yet, because the change isn't complete . . ."

SHE broke off and, with both hands above the fireplace, gripped the rough stone of the mantelpiece. Her tilted green eyes burned with a contradictory play

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of emotions; the soft planes of her face seemed to shift and alter, seeking an impossible balance between ecstasy and terror and a tearing, intolerable agony.

"I'm learning the rest . . . now," she whispered. "Sooner than . . . I thought."

He sensed the change that possessed her, the struggling of new emotions, the shattering of imposed concepts and conditionings and their realigning to shape a new personality, a new person. He knew from that moment that she had been right, and that what he had feared from the beginning of his first seizure was about to happen to him.

She closed her eyes briefly. When she opened them again, Alcorn drew back. Then resentment flared in him and he was suddenly furious at the alteration of status that left him on the defensive.

He remembered the clippings and understood something of the frustrated rage that must have gripped the howling mobs when they killed the two ministers and the Nevada doctor and the Girl Scout leader.

Janice Wynn straightened from the fireplace, her head tilted as if she were listening to some sound beyond range of his own hearing.

"Someone is coming," she said. Her voice had changed as much as her face; her eyes watched him with a remote yet curiously intimate compassion. "Not our people. It isn't time for them yet."

She was at the cabin door before he realized that she had moved.

"Stay here," she ordered. "Don't open the door for anyone. For *anyone*, do you hear?"

She was gone into the outside darkness.

Alcorn felt it himself then, the indefinable certainty of approach. A turbo-copter, then another, slanting down toward his hideaway, two speeding machines filled with grimly intent men—Jaffers' agents.

The 'copters landed about a hundred yards away from the cabin. There was a dragging silence and then a booming, amplified voice.

"Alcorn, come out!"

HE stood fast, feeling above their tension the swift progress of Janice Wynn through the darkness toward them. She was close to the nearer machine when he felt a sudden veering of her attention, followed the direction of her probing, and sensed another 'copter angling down out of the night.

Her mental order was as urgent as a shout: *Let no one in. No one!*

She moved on. The pilot of the third 'copter was only beginning

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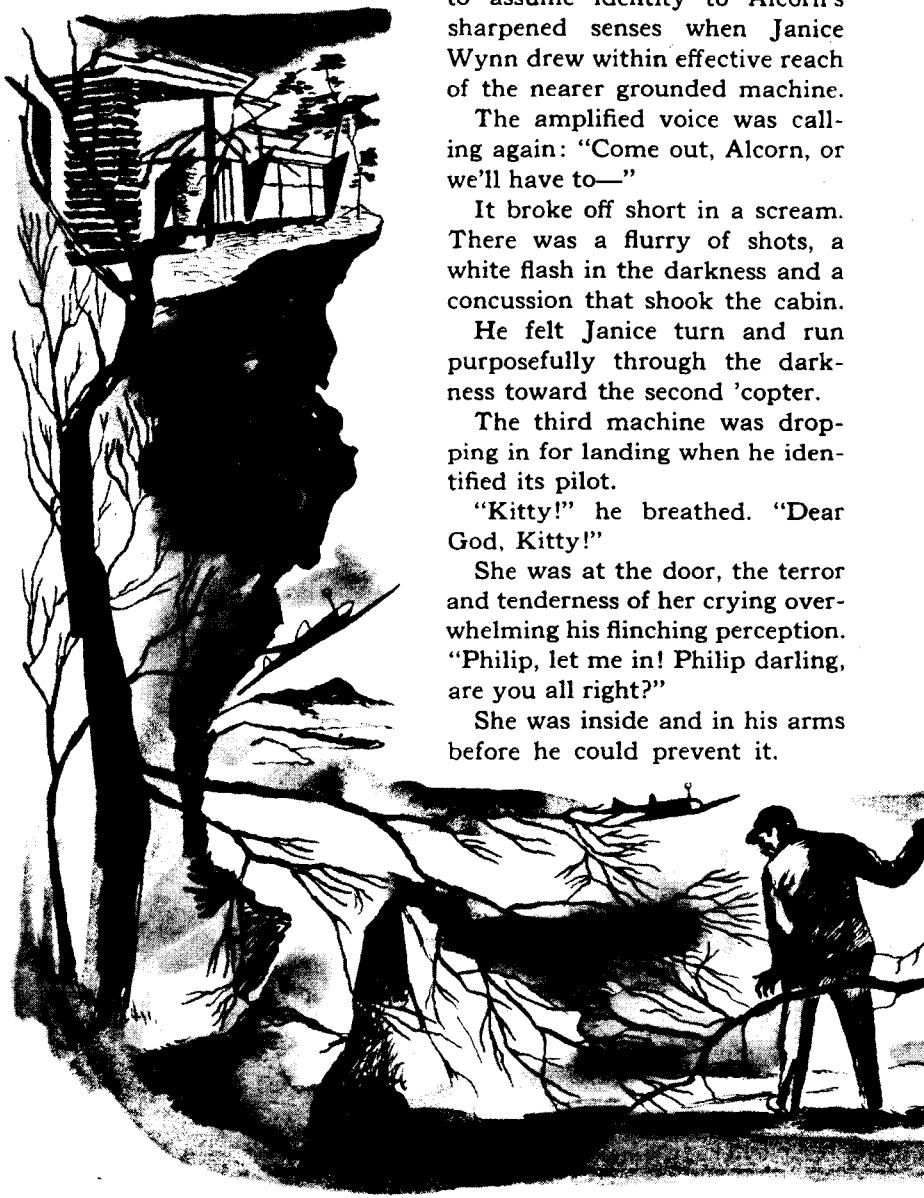

to assume identity to Alcorn's sharpened senses when Janice Wynn drew within effective reach of the nearer grounded machine.

The amplified voice was calling again: "Come out, Alcorn, or we'll have to—"

It broke off short in a scream. There was a flurry of shots, a white flash in the darkness and a concussion that shook the cabin.

He felt Janice turn and run purposefully through the darkness toward the second 'copter.

The third machine was dropping in for landing when he identified its pilot.

"Kitty!" he breathed. "Dear God, Kitty!"

She was at the door, the terror and tenderness of her crying overwhelming his flinching perception. "Philip, let me in! Philip darling, are you all right?"

She was inside and in his arms before he could prevent it.

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She clung to him frantically until the effect of his presence calmed her. The terror went out of her eyes slowly, but the tears glistening on her cheeks contradicted her smile of relief.

"Thank God you're safe, Philip! When I heard on the visinews about Dr. Hagen—"

Janice Wynn's silent command was violent in Alcorn's head. *Put her out quickly! Do you want her there when your own change comes?*

He caught Kitty's hands and drew her toward the door.

"You can't stay here, Kitty. There's no time to explain. I'll call later and tell you everything."

She showed her hurt beneath the placidity his gift imposed upon her. "If I must, Philip. But—"

He threw open the door. "Don't argue, Kitty. For God's sake, go!"

THE blast of the second turbocopter's explosion might have precipitated the seizure that took him just then.

The polar plain sprang up about him, more terribly cold and stark than ever, its clustering buildings and metal machines standing out in such clear perspective that he was certain he could have put out a hand and touched them.

But the people were faceless no longer, except for one that knelt before the group in a tense attitude. Janice Wynn stood over that one while its features filled in slowly, line by line, growing more and more familiar as the face neared identity.

By the time Alcorn realized that it was his own face, the change was fully upon him.

A vast icy wind roared in his ears. A force seized and flung him, distorted and disoriented, to in-

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finity. There were darkness and terror and then a chorus of calm voices calling reassurance. Pain gripped him, and panic, and finally an ecstasy of remembering that was beyond imagining.

Dimly, he heard Kitty's screaming. Something struck him furiously on the shoulder and he felt his distant physical body struggle automatically for balance.

A second blow caught him on the temple and he fell heavily, his new awareness flickering toward unconsciousness. There was a confusion of voices about him and Kitty's raw shrilling died away.

He lay still, secure in the certainty that he was no longer alone.

Mind after mind brushed his, lightly, yet more warming than any clasping of hands, and with each touch, he identified and embraced an old friend whose regard was dearer than his own life. He knew who they were. He was one of them—again.

It's over, Janice Wynn's voice said gently. *Do you remember me now, Filrinn?*

Janeen, he said. He stood up slowly.

Her green eyes stirred with an emotion that matched his own. It was incredible that he could ever have forgotten—no matter how thoroughly he had absorbed the protective conditioning—the unity between himself and Janeen.

I remember, he said. The wonder of it still dazed him. *It's good to be myself again.*

She sighed. *It's good to know why they sent me, instead of one of the others, to bring you back. You remember that?*

"I remember," he said aloud, as if he needed to say the words to make it true. "We were together before this assignment for two hundred of these people's years. We'll be together again for hundreds more, now that we're free to go—for when will we ever find another world that needs attention as this one needed it?"

HE saw the Earthgirl then, curled limply on the cabin's sofa.

Her stillness left him alarmed, surprised and ashamed that he should so readily have forgotten an obligation.

Her dishevelment, and the heavy brass fireplace poker on the rug beside the couch, told him the story at once.

You came just in time, Janeen. Poor Kitty! You didn't hurt her?

Janeen shook her head. *Of course not, Filrinn. I caught her mind before the shock of your change could derange it and—conditioned her. She'll sleep until we've gone, and tomorrow Philip*

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Alcorn will be no more than a pale memory.

Either my conditioning still lingers or my empathetic index is too high . . . I'd like her to know the truth about us, Janeen, before we go.

He knelt beside the couch and smoothed the fair, tousled hair back from the Earthgirl's quiet face.

"I'm sorry it had to be like this, Kitty," he said. He spoke aloud, but his mind touched hers below the level of consciousness. He felt the slow, bewildered surge of response. "It'll help you to forget, perhaps, if you know that we came here from a star system you'll never hear of in your lifetime, to study your people and to see what we could do to help them.

"Alike in form, we are so far apart in nature that you could not have borne our real presence, so we buried our real selves under a mask of conditioning as deeply as we buried our ship under the ice of your planet's pole. After ten years of study, our conditioning was to lift slowly, so that we would realize who and what we were. But you are more like us than we had thought, and with some of us, the conditioning was too strong to break.

"It may help to know that your likeness to us will bring our people together again when the time is right, that your children's children may meet us on equal terms."

HE lifted her from the couch and carried her to her 'copter. He set the machine's controls to automatic and stepped back.

"Good-by, Kitty," he said.

Janeen was waiting for him in the cabin.

The auxiliary shuttle is on its way to pick us up, Filrinn. We'll be gone within the hour.

They stood together, linking their minds, sharing an ecstasy in the meshing of identities that was greater than any physical fulfillment.

But we have that, too, Janeen said for his ears alone. And then, to the calm, smiling faces that lingered in the background of their mingled consciousness: *Leave us.*

The faces withdrew and left them—like children just grown to awareness of their own marvelous gifts—alone.

—ROGER DEE

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Rough Translation

By JEAN M. JANIS

Don't be ashamed if you can't blikkel any more. It's because you couldn't help framishing.

"SHURGUB," said the tape recorder. "Just like I told you before, Dr. Blair, it's krandoor, so don't expect to vrillipax, because they just won't stand for any. They'd sooner framish."

"Framish?" Jonathan heard his own voice played back by the recorder, tinny and slightly nasal. "What is that, Mr. Easton?"

"*You* know. Like when you guttip. Carooms get awfully bevvergrit. Why, I saw one actually—"

"Let's go back a little, shall we?" Jonathan suggested. "What does shurgub mean?"

There was a pause while the machine hummed and the recorder tape whirred. Jonathan remembered the look on Easton's face when he had asked him that. Easton had pulled away slightly, mouth open, eyes hurt.

"Why—why, I *told* you!" he had shouted. "Weeks ago! What's the matter? Don't you blikkel English?"

Jonathan Blair reached out and snapped the switch on the machine. Putting his head in his hands, he stared down at the top of his desk.

You learned Navajo in six months, he reminded himself fiercely.

You are a highly skilled

Illustrated by HUNTER

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linguist. What's the matter? Don't you blikkel English?

HE groaned and started searching through his briefcase for the reports from Psych. Easton must be insane. He must! Ramirez says it's no language. Stoughton says it's no language. And *I*, Jonathan thought savagely, say it's no language.

But—

Margery tiptoed into the study with a tray.

"But Psych," he continued aloud to her, "Psych says it *must* be a language because, they say, Easton is *not* insane!"

"Oh, dear," sighed Margery, blinking her pale blue eyes. "That again?" She set his coffee on the desk in front of him. "Poor Jonathan. Why doesn't the Institute give up?"

"Because they can't." He reached for the cup and sat glaring at the steaming coffee.

"Well," said his wife, settling into the leather chair beside him, "*I* certainly would. My goodness, it's been over a month now since he came back, and you haven't learned a thing from him!"

"Oh, we've learned some. And this morning, for the first time, Easton himself began to seem puzzled by a few of the things he was saying. He's beginning to use terms we can understand. He's coming around. And if I could only find some clue—some sort of—"

Margery snorted. "It's just plain foolish! I knew the Institute was asking for trouble when they sent the *Rhinestead* off. How do they know Easton ever got to Mars, anyway? Maybe he did away with those other men, cruised around, and then came back to Earth with this made-up story just so he could seem to be a hero and—"

"That's nonsense!"

"Why?" she demanded stubbornly. "Why is it?"

"Because the *Rhinestead* was tracked, for one thing, on both flights, to and from Mars. Moonbase has an indisputable record of it. And besides, the instruments on the ship itself show—" He found the report he had been searching for. "Oh, never mind."

"All right," she said defiantly. "Maybe he did get to Mars. Maybe he did away with the crew after he got there. He knew the ship was built so that one man could handle it in an emergency. Maybe he—"

"Look," said Jonathan patiently. "He didn't do anything of the sort. Easton has been checked so thoroughly that it's impossible to assume anything except (a) he is sane, (b) he reached Mars and made contact with the Martians, (c) this linguistic barrier is a result of that contact."

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MARGERY shook her head, sucking in her breath. "When I think of all those fine young men," she murmured. "Heaven only knows what happened to them!"

"You," Jonathan accused, "have been reading that columnist — what's-his-name? The one that's been writing such claptrap ever since Easton brought the *Rhinestead* back alone."

"Cuddlehorn," said his wife. "Roger Cuddlehorn, and it's not claptrap."

"The other members of the crew are all alive, all—"

"I suppose Easton told you that?" she interrupted.

"Yes, he did."

"Using double-talk, of course," said his wife triumphantly. At the look on Jonathan's face, she stood up in guilty haste. "All right, I'll go!" She blew him a kiss from the door. "Richie and I are having lunch at one. Okay? Or would you rather have a tray in here?"

"Tray," he said, turning back to his desk and his coffee. "No, on second thought, call me when lunch is ready. I'll need a break."

He was barely consious of the closing of the door as Margery left the room. Naturally he didn't take her remarks seriously, but—

He opened the folder of pictures and studied them again, along with the interpretations by Psych, Stoughton, Ramirez and himself.

Easton had drawn the little stick figures on the first day of his return. The interpretations all checked—and they had been done independently, too. There it is, thought Jonathan. Easton lands the *Rhinestead*. He and the others meet the Martians. They are impressed by the Martians. The others stay on Mars. Easton returns to Earth, bearing a message.

Question: What is the message?

Teeth set, Jonathan put away the pictures and went back to the tape on the recorder. "Yes," said his own voice, in answer to Easton's outburst. "I do—er—blikkel English. But tell me, Mr. Easton, do you understand me?"

"Under-stand?" The man seemed to have difficulty forming the word. "You mean—" Pause. "Dr. Blair, I murv you. Is that it?"

"Murv," repeated Jonathan. "All right, you murv me. Do you murv this? I do not always murv what you say."

A laugh. "Of course not. How could you?" Suppressed groan. "Carooms," Easton had murmured, almost inaudibly. "Just when I almost murv, the kwakut goes freeble."

Jonathan flipped the switch on the machine. "Murv" he wrote

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on his pad of paper. He added "Blikkel," "Carooms" and "Freeble." He stared at the list. He should understand, he thought. At times it seemed as if he did and then, in the next instant, he was lost again, and Easton was angry, and they had to start all over again.

SIGHING, he took out more papers, notes from previous sessions, both with himself and with other linguists. The difficulty of reaching Easton was unlike anything he had ever before tackled. The six months of Navajo had been rough going, but he had done it, and done it well enough to earn the praise of Old Comas, his informant. Surely, he thought, after mastering a language like that, one in which the student must not only learn to imitate difficult sounds, but also learn a whole new pattern of thought—

Pattern of thought. Jonathan sat very still, as though movement would send the fleeting clue back into the corner from which his mind had glimpsed it.

A whole new frame of reference. Suppose, he toyed with the thought, suppose the Martian language, whatever it was, was structured along the lines of Navajo, involving clearly defined categories which did not exist in English.

"Murv," he said aloud. "I murv a lesson, but I blikkel a language."

Eagerly, Jonathan reached again for the switch. Categories clearly defined, yes! But the categories of the Martian language were not those of the concrete or the particular, like the Navajo They were of the abstract. Where one word "understand" would do in English, the Martian used two—

Good Lord, he realized, they might use hundreds! They might—

Jonathan turned on the machine, sat back and made notes, letting the recorder run uninterrupted. He made his notes, this time, on the feelings he received from the words Easton used. When the first tape was done, he put on the second.

Margery tapped at the door just as the third tape was ending. "In a minute," he called, scribbling furiously. He turned off the machine, put out his cigarette and went to lunch, feeling better than he had in weeks.

Richie was at the kitchen sink, washing his hands.

"And next time," Margery was saying, "you wash up before you sit down."

Richie blinked and watched Jonathan seat himself. "Daddy didn't wash his hands," he said.

Margery fixed the six-year-old

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with a stern eye. "Richard, don't be rude."

"Well, he didn't." Richie sat down and reached for his glass of milk.

"Daddy probably washed before he came in," said Margery. She took the cover off a tureen, ladled soup into bowls and passed sandwiches, pretending not to see the ink-stained hand Jonathan was hiding in his lap.

Jonathan, elated by the promise of success, ate three or four sandwiches, had two bowls of soup and finally sat back while Margery went to get coffee.

Richie slid part way off his chair, remembered, and slid back on again. "Kin I go?" he asked.

"Please may I be excused," corrected his father.

RICHIE repeated, received a nod and ran out of the dinette and through the kitchen, grabbing a handful of cookies on the way. The screen door banged behind him as he raced into the backyard.

"Richie!" Margery started after him, eyes ablaze. Then she stopped and came back to the table with the coffee. "That boy! How long does it take before they get to be civilized?" Jonathan laughed. "Oh, sure," she went on, sitting down opposite him. "It's funny to you. But if you were here all day long—" She stirred sugar into her cup. "We should have sent him to camp, even if it would have wrecked the budget!"

"Oh? Is it that bad?"

Margery shuddered. "Sometimes he's a perfect angel, and then— It's unbelievable, the things that child can think of! Sometimes I'm convinced children are another species altogether! Why, only this morning—"

"Well," Jonathan broke in, "next summer he goes to camp." He stood up and stretched.

Margery said wistfully, "I suppose you want to get back to work."

"Ummmm." Jonathan leaned over and kissed her briefly. "I've got a new line of attack," he said, picking up his coffee. He patted his wife's shoulder. "If things work out well, we might get away on that vacation sooner than we thought."

"Really?" she asked, brightening.

"Really." He left the table and went back to his den.

Putting the next tape on the machine, he settled down to his job. Time passed and finally there were no more tapes to listen to.

He stacked his notes and began making lists, checking through the sheets of paper for repetitions of words Easton had

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used, listing the various connotations which had occurred to Jonathan while he had listened to the tapes.

As he worked, he was struck by the similarity of the words he was recording to the occasional bits of double-talk he had heard used by comedians in theaters and on the air, and he allowed his mind to wander a bit, exploring the possibilities.

Was Martian actually such a close relative to English? Or had the Martians learned English from Easton, and had Easton then formed a sort of pidgin-English-Martian of his own?

Jonathan found it difficult to believe in the coincidence of the two languages being alike, unless—

He laughed. Unless, of course, Earthmen were descended from Martians, or vice versa. Oh, well, not my problem, he thought jauntily.

HE stared at the list before him and then he started to swear, softly at first, then louder. But no matter how loudly he swore, the list remained undeniably and obstinately the same:

Freeble—Displeasure (Tape 3)
Freeble—Elation (Tape 4)
Freeble—Grief (Tape 5)

"How," he asked the empty room, "can a word mean grief and elation at the same time?"

Jonathan sat for a few moments in silence, thinking back to the start of the sessions with Easton. Ramirez and Stoughton had both agreed with him that Easton's speech was phonemically identical to English. Jonathan's trained ear remembered the pronunciation of "Freeble" in the three different connotations and he forced himself to admit it was the same on all three tapes in question.

Stuck again, he thought gloomily.

Good-by, vacation!

He lit a cigarette and stared at the ceiling. It was like saying the word "die" meant something happy and something sad at one and the same, like saying—

Jonathan pursed his lips. Yes, it could be. If someone were in terrible pain, death, while a thing of sorrow, could also mean release from suffering and so become a thing of joy. Or it could mean sorrow to one person and relief to another. In that case, what he was dealing with here was not only—

The crash of the ball, as it sailed through the window behind his desk, lifted Jonathan right from his chair. Furious, his elusive clue shattered as surely as the pane of glass, he strode to the window.

"Richie!"

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His son, almost hidden behind the lilac bush, did not answer.

"I see you!" Jonathan bellowed. "Come here!"

The bush stirred slightly and Richie peeped through the leaves. "Did you call me, Daddy?" he asked politely.

Jonathan clamped his lips shut and pointed to the den. Richie tried a smile as he sidled around the bush, around his father, and into the house.

"My," he marveled, looking at the broken glass on the floor inside. "My goodness!" He sat down in the leather chair to which Jonathan motioned.

"Richie," said his father, when he could trust his voice again, "how did it happen?"

His son's thin legs, brown and wiry, stuck out straight from the depths of the chair. There was a long scratch on one calf and numerous black-and-blue spots around both knees.

"I dunno," said Richie. He blinked his eyes, deeper blue than Margery's, and reached up one hand to push away the mass of blond hair tumbling over his forehead. He was obviously trying hard to pretend he wasn't in the room at all.

JONATHAN said, "Now, son, that is not a good answer. What were you doing when the ball went through the window?"

"Watching," said Richie truthfully.

"How did it *go* through the window?"

"Real fast."

Jonathan found his teeth were clamped. No wonder he couldn't decode Easton's speech — he couldn't even talk with his own son!

"I mean," he explained, his patience wavering, "you threw the ball so that it broke the window, didn't you?"

"I didn't mean it to," said Richie.

"All right. That's what I wanted to know." He started on a lecture about respect for other people's property, while Richie sat and looked blankly respectful. "And so," he heard himself conclude, "I hope we'll be more careful in the future."

"Yes," said Richie.

A vague memory came to Jonathan and he sat and studied his son, remembering him when he was younger and first starting to talk. He recalled the time Richie, age three, had come bustling up to him. "Vransh!" the child had pleaded, tugging at his father's hand. Jonathan had gone outside with him to see a baby bird which had fallen from its nest. "Vransh!" Richie had crowed, exhibiting his find. "Vransh!"

"Do I get my spanking now?" asked Richie from the chair. His

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eyes were wide and watchful.

Jonathan tore his mind from still another recollection: the old joke about the man and woman who adopted a day-old French infant and then studied French so they would be able to understand their child when he began to talk. Maybe, thought Jonathan, it's no joke. Maybe there *is* a language—

"Spanking?" he repeated absentmindedly. He took a fresh pencil and pad of paper. "How would you like to help with something, Richie?"

The blue eyes watched carefully. "Before you spank me or after?"

"No spanking." Jonathan glanced at the Easton notes, vaguely aware that Richie had suddenly relaxed. "What I'm going to do," he went on, "is say some words. It'll be a kind of game. I'll say a word and then you say a word. You say the first word you think after you hear my word. Okay?" He cleared his throat. "Okay! The first word is—house."

"*My* house."

"Bird," said Jonathan.

"Uh— tree." Richie scratched his nose and stifled a yawn.

DISAPPOINTED, Jonathan reminded himself that Richie at six could not be expected to remember something he had said when he was three. "Dog."

"Biffy." Richie sat up straight. "Daddy, did you know Biffy had puppies? Steve's mother showed me. Biffy had four puppies, Daddy. *Four!*"

Jonathan nodded. He supposed Richie's next statement would be an appeal to go next door and negotiate for one of the pups, and he hurried on with, "Carooms."

"Friends," said Richie, eyes still shining. "Daddy, do you suppose *we* could have a pup—" He broke off at the look on Jonathan's face. "Huh?"

"Friends," repeated Jonathan, writing the word slowly and unsteadily. "Uh— vacation."

"Beach," said Richie cautiously, still looking scared.

Jonathan went on with more familiar terms and Richie slowly relaxed again in the big chair. From somewhere in the back of his mind, Jonathan heard Margery say, "Sometimes I think they're a different species altogether." He kept his voice low and casual, uncertain of what he was thinking, but aware of the fact that Richie was hiding something. The little mantel clock ticked drowsily, and Richie began to look sleepy and bored as they went through things like "car" and "school" and "book." Then—

"Friend," said Jonathan.

"Allavarg," yawned Richie.

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"No!" He snapped to, alert and wary. "I mean *Steve*."

His father looked up sharply. "What's that?"

"What?" asked Richie.

"Richie," said Jonathan, "what's a Caroom?"

The boy shrugged and muttered, "*I* dunno."

"Oh, yes, you do!" Jonathan lit a cigarette. "What's an Allavarg?" He watched the boy bite his lips and stare out the window. "He's a friend, isn't he?" coaxed Jonathan. "*Your* friend? Does he play with you?"

The blond head nodded slowly and uncertainly.

"Where does he live?" persisted Jonathan. "Does he come over here and play in your yard? Does he, Richie?"

The boy stared at his father, worried and unhappy. "Sometimes," he whispered. "Sometimes he does, if I call him."

"How do you call him?" asked Jonathan. He was beginning to feel foolish.

"Why," said Richie, "I just say 'Here, Allavarg!' and he comes, if he's not too busy."

"What keeps him busy?" Such nonsense! Allavarg was undoubtedly an imaginary playmate. This whole hunch of his was utter nonsense. He should be at work on Easton instead of—

"The nursery keeps him busy," said Richie. "Real busy."

JONATHAN frowned. Did Richie mean the greenhouse down the road? Was there a Mr. Allavarg who worked there? "Whose nursery?"

"Ours." Richie wrinkled his face thoughtfully. "I think I better go outside and play."

"*Our* nursery?" Jonathan stared at his son. "Where is it?"

"I think I better go play," said Richie more firmly, sliding off the chair.

"Richard! *Where* is the nursery?"

The full lower lip began to tremble. "I can't tell you!" Richie wailed. "I promised!"

Jonathan slammed his fist on the desk. "Answer me!" He knew he shouldn't speak this way to Richie; he knew he was frightening the boy. But the ideas racing through his mind drove him to find out what this was all about. It might be nothing, but it also might be— "Answer me, Richard!"

The child stifled a sob. "Here," he said weakly.

"*Here?* Where?"

"In my house," said Richie. "And Steve's house and Billy's and all over." He rubbed his eyes, leaving a grimy smear.

"All right," soothed Jonathan. "It's all right now, son. Daddy didn't mean to scare you. Daddy has to learn these things, that's all. Just like learning in school."

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The boy shook his head resentfully. "*You* know," he accused. "You just forgot."

"What did I forget, Richie?"

"You forgot all about Allavarg. He told me! It was a different Allavarg when you were little, but it was almost the same. You used to play with *your* Allavarg when you were little like me!"

Jonathan took a deep breath. "Where did Allavarg come from, Richie?"

But Richie shook his head stubbornly, lips pressed tight. "I promised!"

"Richie, a promise like that isn't a good one," pleaded Jonathan. "Allavarg wouldn't want you to disobey your father and mother, would he?"

The child sat and stared at him.

This was a very disturbing thought and Jonathan could see Richie did not know how to deal with it.

He pressed his momentary advantage. "Allavarg takes care of little boys and girls, doesn't he? He plays with them and he looks after them, I'll bet."

Richie nodded uncertainly.

"And," continued Jonathan, smiling what he hoped was a winning, comradely smile at his son, "I'll bet that Allavarg came from some place far, far away, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Richie softly.

"And it's his job to be here and look after the—the nursery?" Jonathan bit his lip. Nursery? Earth? Carooms—Martians? His head began to ache. "Son, you've got to help me understand. Do you—do you murv me?"

RICHIE shook his head. "No. But I *will* after—"

"After what?"

"After I grow up."

"Why not now?" asked Jonathan.

The blond head sank lower. "Because you framish, Daddy."

His father nodded, trying to look wise, wincing inwardly as he pictured his colleagues listening in on this conversation. "Well—why don't you help me so I *don't* framish?"

"I can't." Richie glanced up, his eyes stricken. "Some day, Allavarg says, *I'm* going to framish, too!"

"Grow up, you mean?" hazarded Jonathan, and this time his smile was real as he looked at the smudged eyes and soft round cheeks. "Why, Richie," he went on, his voice suddenly husky, "it's fun to be a little boy, but there'll be lots to do when you grow up. You—"

"I wish I was Mr. Easton!" Richie said fiercely.

Jonathan held his breath. "What about Mr. Easton?"

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Richie squirmed out of the chair and clutched Jonathan's arm. "Please, Daddy! If you let Mr. Easton go back, can I go, too? Please? Can I?"

Jonathan put his hands on his son's shoulders. "Richie! What do you know about Mr. Easton?"

"Please? Can I go with him?" The shining blue eyes pleaded up at him. "If you don't let him go back pretty soon, he's going to framish again! Please! Can I?"

"He's going to framish," nodded Jonathan. "And what then?" he coaxed. "What'll happen after he framishes? Will he be able to tell me about his trip?"

"*I* dunno," said Richie. "I dunno how he *could*. After you framish, you don't remember lots of things. I don't think he's even gonna remember he *went* on a trip." The boy's hands shook Jonathan's arm eagerly. "Please, Daddy! Can I go with him?"

"No!" Jonathan glared and released his hold on Richie. Didn't he have troubles enough without Richie suggesting— "About the nursery," he said briskly. "Why is there a nursery?"

"To take care of us." Richie looked worried. "Why can't I go?"

"Because you can't! Why don't they have the nursery back where Allavarg came from?"

"There isn't any room." The blue eyes studied the man, looking for a way to get permission to go with Mr. Easton.

"No room? What do you mean?"

Richie sighed. Obviously he'd have to explain first and coax later. "Well, you know my school? You know my teacher in school? You know when my teacher was different?" He peered anxiously at Jonathan, and suddenly the man caught on.

"Of course! You mean when they split the kindergarten into two smaller groups because there were too many—"

HIS voice trailed off. Too many. Too many what? Too many Martians on Mars? Growing population? No way to cut down the birth rate? He pictured the planet with too many people. What to do? Move out. Take another planet. Why didn't they just do that? He put the question to Richie.

"Oh," said his son wisely, "they couldn't because of the framish. They *did* go other places, but everywhere they went, they framished. And after you framish, you ain't—*aren't* a Caroom any more. You're a Gunderguck and of course—"

"Huh?"

"—and a Caroom doesn't like to framish and be a Gunderguck," continued Richie happily, as though reciting a lesson learn-

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ed in school. "He wants to be a Caroom *all* the time because it's better and more fun and you know lots of things you don't remember after you get to be a Gunderguck. Only—" he paused for a gulp of air— "only there wasn't room for *all* the Carooms back home and they couldn't find any place where they could be Carooms all the time, because of the framish. So after a long time, and after they looked all over all around, they decided maybe it wouldn't be so bad if they sent some of their little boys and girls —the ones they didn't have room for—to some place where they could be Carooms longer than most other places. And *that* place," Richie said proudly, "was right here! 'Cause *here* there's almost as much gladdisl as back home and—"

"Gladdisl?" Jonathan echoed hoarsely. "What's—"

"—and after they start growing up—"

"Gladdisl," Jonathan repeated, more firmly. "Richie, what is it?"

The forehead puckered momentarily. "It's something you breathe, sort of." The boy shied away from the difficult question, trying to remember what Allavarg had said about gladdisl. "Anyway, after the little boys and girls start to grow up and after they framish and be Gundergucks, like you and Mommy, the Carooms back home send some *more* to take their places. And the Gundergucks who used to be Carooms here in the nursery look after the new little—"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" Jonathan interrupted suspiciously. "I thought you said Allavarg looks after them."

"He does. But there's so many little Carooms and there aren't many Allavargs and so the Gundergucks have to help. You help," Richie assured his father. "You and Mommy help a little bit."

Big of you to admit it, old man, thought Jonathan, suppressing a smile. "But aren't you *our* little boy?" he asked. He had a sudden vision of himself addressing the scientists at the Institute: "And so, gentlemen, our babies — who, incidentally, are really Martians—*are* brought by storks, after all. Except in those cases where—"

"The doctor brought me in a little black bag," said Richie.

THE boy stood silent and studied his father. He sort of remembered what Allavarg had said, too. Things like *You mustn't ever tell* and *It's got to be a secret* and *They'd only laugh at you, Richie, and if they didn't laugh, they might believe you and try to go back home and*

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there just isn't any room.

"I think," said Richie, "I think I better—" He took a deep breath. "Here, Allavarg," he called in a soft, piping voice.

Jonathan raised his head. "Just what do you think you're doing—"

There was a sound behind him, and Jonathan turned startledly.

"Shame on you," said Allavarg, coming through the broken window.

Jonathan's words dropped away in a faint gurgle.

"I'm sorry," said Richie. "Don't be dipplefit."

"It's a mess," Allavarg replied. "It's a krandoor mess!" He waved his arm in the air over Jonathan's head. "And don't think I'm going to forget it!" The insistent hiss of escaping gas hovered over the moving pellet in his hand. "Jivis boy!"

Jonathan coughed suddenly. He got as far as "Now look here" and then found that he could neither speak nor move. The gas or whatever it was stung his eyes and burned in his throat.

"Why don't you just freeble him?" Richie asked unhappily. "You're using up all your gladdisl! Why don't you freeble him and get me another one?"

"Freeble, breeble," grumbled Allavarg, shoving the capsule directly under Jonathan's nose. "Just like you youngsters, always wanting to take the easy way out! Gundergucks don't grow on blansercots, you know."

Jonathan felt tears start in his eyes, partly from the fumes and partly from a growing realization that Allavarg was sacrificing precious air for him. He tried to think. If this was gladdisl and if this would keep a man in the state of being a Caroom, then—

"There," said Allavarg, looking unhappily at the emptied pellet. He shook it, sniffed it and finally returned it to the container at his side.

"I'm sorry," Richie whispered. "But he kept askin' me and askin' me."

"There, there," said Allavarg, going to the window. "Don't fret. I know you won't do it again." He turned and looked thoughtfully at Jonathan. He winked at Richie and then he was gone.

JONATHAN rubbed his eyes. He could move now. He opened his mouth and waggled his jaws. Now that the room was beginning to be cleared of the gas, he realized that it had had a pleasant odor. He realized—

Why, it was all so simple! Remembering his sessions with Easton, Jonathan laughed aloud. So simple! The message? *Stay away from Mars! No room there! They*

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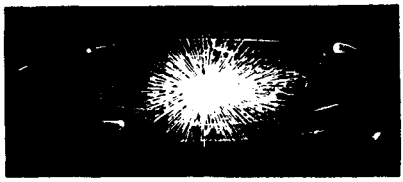
said I could come back if I gave you the message, but I have to come back alone because there's no room for more people!

No room? Nonsense! Jonathan reached for the phone, dialed the Institute and asked for Dr. Stoughton. No room? On the paradise that was Mars? Well, they'd just have to make room! They couldn't keep that to themselves!

"Hello, Fred?" He leaned back in his chair, feeling a surge of pride and power. Wait till they heard about this! "Just wanted to tell you I solved the Easton thing. Just a simple case of hapsodon. You see, Allavarg came and gave me a tressimox of gladdisl and now that I'm a Caroom again— What? What do you mean, what's the matter? I said I'm not a Gunderguck any more." He stared at the phone. "Why, you spebberset moron! What's the matter with you? Don't you blikkel English?"

From the depths of the big chair across the room, Richie giggled.

—JEAN M. JANIS



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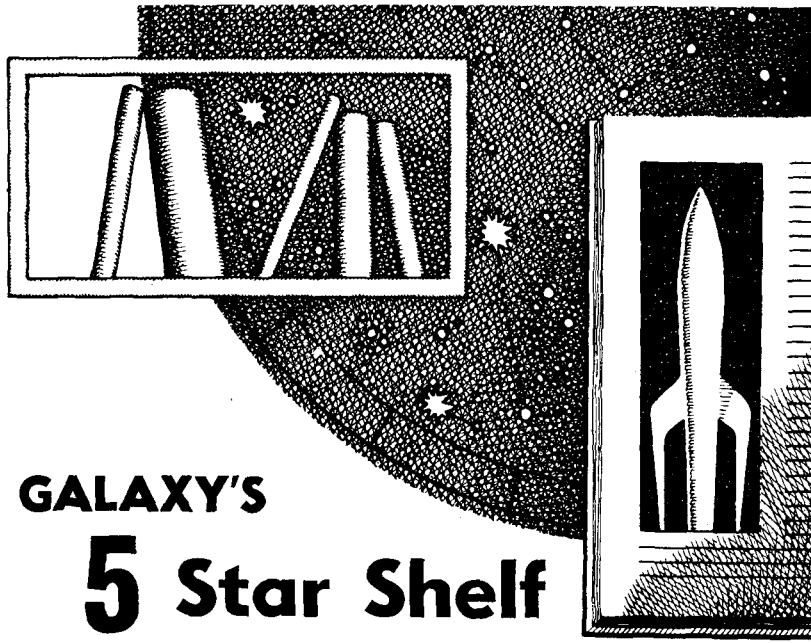

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

THE month of July, when this column was written, was quite unproductive of good (or even bad) science fiction and fantasy. Three books came in, of which only one deserves extended mention. I shall cover these books at the end of this report, and meanwhile would like to indulge in a bit of autobiography—and a review of a science fantasy book that has never been available in this country and has been out of print for many years even in England, where it was published in 1920.

I was nostalgically searching through my memories during the July heat wave to ferret out my earliest contacts with science fiction. I actually did not become an earnest devotee of the form until 1944, about a year before the Atomic Age actually opened.

As a matter of fact, my first letter to Crown Publishers, proposing what eventually became my first s-f. anthology, *The Best of Science Fiction,* was written on August 8, 1944, exactly one year minus one day before the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima was announced. It was during the ensuing year that I

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spent evenings and weekends in the Library of Congress, browsing through the back files of all the science fiction magazines published to that date.

Previous to that time, my contacts with the field had been sporadic in the extreme. The first item I remember reading that could be classed as science fiction was H. G. Wells' *Men Like Gods*, back in 1924, when I was a college sophomore. It had a tremendous effect on me, though not as science fiction. It provided a turning point in my whole approach to philosophy and religion, with its rationalist utopian world.

From there, I went on through Wells' other "science" novels, though, and loved them all for what they were, brilliant superscientific adventures.

My next dip into science fiction came around 1930, when I was sharing an apartment with a highly literate young man by the name of Frederick H. Wood. (He now owns and operates a fine book store in Bridgeport, Conn.)

Fred was a devotee of the literature of the imagination and had several bound volumes of tearsheets of early weirds, fantastics and "scientifictions" from the old *Argosy, All-Story* and others—George Allan England, Garrett P. Serviss, Austin Hall, Victor Rousseau, and, last but far from least, A. Merritt.

Merritt was the man whose vivid imagination and writing ability attracted me most at the time, particularly *The Moon Pool* and *The Face in the Abyss*. These fine fantastic tales are nearly as readable today (for me, at least) as they were almost 25 years ago.

But the story that made the greatest impression on me during my sojourn with Fred Wood was a remarkable volume called *A Voyage to Arcturus*. It was written by an obscure British spiritualist named David Lindsay. It is the only book of his I have ever seen, though Everett Bleiler's *Checklist of Fantastic Literature* mentions three others.

I have reread this strange book at least six times since, the last time this summer, and I can only report that it still has all the fascination for me now that it did when I first read it. Oddly, one of its most fascinating aspects is its almost impenetrable obscurity. Each reading left me with a different idea of what Lindsay was driving at; I still don't really know.

It is not an obscurity of language, but of concepts. The writing is above average, and the magnificent originality and vividness of the descriptions of an incredibly different planet make the book immensely worth reading, even though one is never really

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sure what it is all about.

It commences inauspiciously enough, with a conventional "seance" in a British town house, the purpose of which is to observe a medium materialize someone from the "invisible world." As the medium is about to commence his efforts, two strangers join the party. Their names are Maskull and Nightspore, and they are as forbidding as their names.

The materialization proceeds and a young man draped in a shroud takes solid form in the room, lying on a couch. No sooner is he "present" than a third stranger breaks in unannounced. This saturnine individual, whose name is Krag, wrings the neck of the materialized creature, throwing consternation into the party, which naturally breaks up in a hurry. Maskull, Nightspore and Krag depart together.

The three men go to "the famous Starkness Observatory" on the northeast coast of Scotland. From there they are transplanted by Krag, in a highly improbable spaceship, to Tormance, the sole planet of the double suns of Arcturus.

It is from this point on that the book becomes almost impossible to put down. From the evidence, Tormance is in an early stage of development, a world on which some strange force is continuously experimenting with different types of life-forms and intelligences.

Parts of the planet are highly unstable, with gigantic ground movements and changes. Others are coldly mountainous and bleak. Still others are covered with trees two hundred feet in diameter. Indeed, no part of the planet that Maskull, who is the protagonist, investigates is like any other part.

Maskull goes through a series of strange, compulsive, dreamlike adventures, which nevertheless are vividly real despite their nightmarish quality. As one reads on, one begins to realize that the book is a sort of *Pilgrim's Progress* in reverse, the end of which is not salvation but death.

Each adventure exemplifies some ethical concept: passionless love of beauty and self-sacrifice; passionate will and selfishness; duty and asceticism; the "real world" of cause and effect; a "dream world" of pure, unadulterated sex; and so on. Some of the episodes seem completely meaningless, yet even they are fascinating.

Indeed, the book is a mystic, "unsane" maze of symbols, of abstracts made real by the demonic imagination of the author.

It is perhaps this unrelieved obscurity of purpose and story line that has kept the book al-

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most unknown in the science fantasy world. Many readers may well wonder what the shouting (mine, that is) is all about. Yet for somber magnificence of descriptive power and for an almost mesmeric ability to keep the reader going, whether he knows where or not, the book is an unforgettable experience, even though it is not really science fiction at all.

I hope that some American publisher will have the daring to reprint it. I suspect it would sell, obscurity and all.

DEEP SPACE by Eric Frank Russell. Fantasy Press, Inc., $3.00

THIS collection reinforces my long-held opinion that Eric Frank Russell, quietly and without much to-do, has become one of the very best writers of mature science fiction of our time.

Of the nine novelets and short stories in the book, only one is, to my mind, poor. That is "Second Genesis," the last story in the volume. Two or three others are a bit on the frothy side. "Homo Saps," for instance, originally published under the pseudonym of Webster Craig, is hardly a momentous tale, wryly humbling for the human ego though its point is.

But, in general, the stories have depth of perception and real maturity of viewpoint, and are told with all the mastery of a born storyteller.

In addition to the two mentioned, the book contains "First Person Singular," "The Witness," "The Timid Tiger," "Last Blast," "A Little Oil," "Rainbow's End," and the somewhat overcoincidental "The Undecided"—which nevertheless is a moving vision of how, millions of years from now, "all life" (not "all men") will be brothers.

None of the stories has been anthologized elsewhere, so that the book becomes an essential addition to any library of top-grade science fiction.

THE STARS ARE OURS by Andre Norton. World Publishing Co., $2.75

MISS Norton's third science fiction novel for young people has to even greater a degree than the first two the merits and defects of her approach to the problem of writing for youth.

On the asset side, she has written a genuinely exciting adventure. The first half deals with the efforts of a secret group of scientists and technicians to build and launch a starship in a post-atomic-war world where science is feared and fought, and "The Peacemen," ignorant and superstition-ridden dictators, rule the world.

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The second half tells of the efforts of the starship's crew to establish themselves on the new planet of a far star to which the ship had taken them. It is also, like Miss Norton's previous books, inherently a strong plea for peace and brotherhood among men.

But the other side of the ledger shows an entirely unwarranted amount of cruelty and almost sadistically contrived bloodshed during the course of the story that I feel detracts considerably from its value.

It is completely possible to write a strong and adventuresome anti-utopia and space-flight tale of tomorrow without such a fascinated emphasis on brutality, and I wish Miss Norton would learn the technique.

The book is, frankly, a thriller, hard to put down. But I would recommend it to the young only with reservations. It is hardly for the impressionable teen-ager, any more than are some of the bloodier comic books.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT by Nelson Bond. Avon Publications, Inc., 35c

TWELVE of Bond's slick and somehow empty science fantasies comprise this paperback original, and offer the reader a pleasant but hardly rewarding couple of hours' reading. There are no copyright credits, so that original magazine sources are unrevealed. Three of the tales have been anthologized previously, according to my records—which may well be incomplete.

I found two of the stories of considerable interest: "The Last Outpost" and "The World of William Gresham." Both deal with subjective visions of the future which may or may not eventually turn out to be true, and both are vividly horrid.

The rest of the tales seemed to me to be of only passing interest.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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joy ride

By MARK MEADOWS

Men or machines—something had to give—though not necessarily one or the other. Why not both?

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

(HISTORIAN'S NOTE: *The following statements are extracted from depositions taken by the Commission of Formal Inquiry appointed by the Peloric Rehabilitation Council, a body formed as a provisional government in the third month of the Calamity.*)

1

MY name is Andrews, third assistant vice president in charge of maintenance for Cybernetic Publishers.

It is not generally known that all the periodical publications for the world were put out by Cybernetics. We did not conceal the monopoly deliberately, but we found that using the names of other publishing houses helped to give our magazines an impression of variety. Of course, we didn't want too much variety, either; only the tried and tested kind.

Cybernetics gained its monopoly by cutting costs of production. It had succeeded in linking electronic calculators to photo-

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copying machines. Through this combination, all kinds of texts and illustrations could be produced automatically.

FORMULA punch cards, fed to the calculators, produced articles and stories of standard styles and substance. Market analysts in the research division designed the formulas for the punch cards. An editing machine shuffled the cards before giving them to the calculating machines.

The shuffling produced enough variation in the final product to suggest novelty to the reader without actually presenting anything strange or unexpected.

Once the cards were in the machine, they set off electronic impulses which, by a scanning process, projected photographic images of type and illustrations to a ribbon of paper. This ribbon ran through a battery of xerographic machines to reproduce the exact number of copies specified by the market indicator.

Everything worked smoothly without the necessity for thought, which, as you know, is expensive and often wasteful.

In the second week of the Calamity, one machine after another seemed to go out of order. I couldn't tell whether the trouble was in the cards, in the research office, or in the machines.

First, one produced something entitled "A Critique of the Bureaucratic Culture Pattern." Then another would give out nothing but lyric poems. A third simply printed obvious gibberish, the letters F-R-E-E-D-O-M. And one of our oldest machines ran off a series of limericks of a decidedly pungent flavor.

I did all I could to straighten them out. Even our cleaning compounds were analyzed for traces of alcohol. But we weren't able to locate the trouble. And we didn't dare shut off the power because that would have backed up our continuous stream of pulp and paper all the way to Canada, Alaska and Scandinavia. There didn't seem to be anything to do but let the publications go on through to the distribution center.

Before they were returned to the pulp mills, some of the publications reached private hands and created something of a stir, especially the limericks. One of them went something like this: "There was a young . . ." (Passage defaced.)

2

MY name is Minton, traffic officer emeritus on the Extrapolated Parkway.

The Parkway was equipped with the usual electronic controls to propel cars magnetically, to maintain a safe distance between

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all cars, and to hold them automatically in their proper lanes. The controls also turned cars off the Parkways at the proper exit, according to the settings on the individual automobile's direction-finder.

On the ninth day of the Calamity, the controls became erratic. Cars ran off the highway at the wrong exits, even though their direction-finders seemed to be in good order. Many turned around in circles at entrances to the Parkway and failed to enter. Drivers abandoned cars in despair and actually made their way on foot. Those who remembered how to steer by hand, mainly persons with obsolete cars, were able to travel by using back country roads. It was almost like old times, when we used to have accidents.

Meanwhile, I kept getting radio calls from motorists whose cars were trapped on the highway. They were unable to turn off anywhere, even at the wrong exit. The magnetic propellers forced them to continue traveling a circular route for hours. I don't know what they expected *me* to do about it.

They tried to say I tampered with the controls, but I had no such orders. There was nothing in the Traffic Officer's Manual to cover this situation, so I naturally did nothing.

Anyway, I think that the trouble lay with the direction-finders in the cars rather than with the Highway Controls. For several days previously, a great many cars no matter how the automatic direction-finders were set, had been known to head for water if they weren't watched. Because of the fact that so many motorists had formed a habit of snoozing, once the car was in motion, there were a number of drownings. If we could have done anything to prevent them, we probably would have, though that wasn't our job.

3

MY name is Elder, sound director for Station 40 N 180.

We had noticed nothing unusual about our broadcasts until the third day of the Calamity. That was the first time one of our ultra-sensitive microphones began to pick up and broadcast speeches from unknown sources.

Our third assistant monitor was the first to notice. He called and told me that interference was disrupting the program. A few minutes later, he said that the sponsor's message, as broadcast, did not conform to the copy which had been put on the tape. (To eliminate studio errors, all our broadcast programs were first recorded on electro-magnetic tape

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and edited before they were released.

We checked and found that none of the commercial messages were going through properly. The fact is that they were broadcast very improperly.

I tested the microphone myself and was reported as saying, "What difference does it make?" I had used the conventional testing phrases, "One, two, three, four," yet all three monitors swore that the other sentence had been uttered in my voice.

We switched at once to broadcasting music exclusively as an alternative to verbal programs, but the microphones continued to pickup vocal interference. The voices were of many kinds and not always distinct. They sounded sincere and the words were plain, but I could not discern any meaning in them.

FOR a while, until the Calamity affected wire communications, too, we received telephone comments from our audience.

A few people complained about the confusion, but most asked us to turn off the music and let the voices come through clearly.

One of the listeners said to us, "I haven't heard men speak their minds so plainly since the morning Grandma wrecked Grandpa's new helicopter."

4

MY name is Wilson. I manned the remote control panel for the Duplicator Construction Company.

As you know, we directed a battery of building machines which erected mass housing projects. I directed only the destination of our machines. Once I sent them to a site, they completed their work automatically with the materials installed at our supply depot.

A single machine could prepare a site and erect a complete house in one day. With an army of 5,000 machines, our firm had succeeded in building as many houses as there was room for, and we had started on the demolition of our original buildings for replacement with the modern economy-size model. This made room for three families where one had lived before. We started this replacement program the week before the Calamity.

The first hint of trouble was a call from a checker to the front office. I happened to be there when he appeared on the vidscreen and said that one of our machines had built a Chinese pagoda. He seemed to think it was funny.

Then we began to receive other reports. Our machines were building grape arbors, covered bridges,

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cloisters, music halls, green houses, dancing pavilions and hunting lodges.

One machine was not building at all, but had gone on a rampage, clearing ground where we had just completed one thousand of the new economy-size dwelling units.

The machine was dynamited by our emergency squad.

5

MY name is Fisher. On the first day of the Calamity, I was a member of an audience which had been employed by the Spectacle Commission to observe the start of the Forty-Ton-Shovel-Cross-Continent-Ditch-Digging Contest.

This was the first time that power shovels of this size had been used to dig a ditch more than a thousand miles long. I was very proud to be in that audience.

The contest started on time. The shovels were marshaled and on their marks at the city line. The Mayor fired a disarmed war rocket as the signal to start.

And then the shovels, instead of biting into the dirt, turned at right angles and began to chew a path through the paid audience.

This was not called for in the contract and many hired spectators ran away in fright, but a few of us had enough professional pride to stand by. We watched as the shovels cut an irregular path through streets, parks and open lots in the city snapping at everything in their way until they reached the waterfront.

I thought they would stop at the docks. The leaders *did* pause, until all the shovels had come abreast. Then, as if they had a common impulse, they rolled into the harbor and sank in unison.

As I later said to my wife, it was quite extraordinary.

6

MY name is Danville. I was watching a colorvision program on the first day of the Calamity.

The program was a wrestling match between a woman and a bear. The bear was winning when the screen went dark. The announcer's voice faded and I heard what sounded like the chatter of my neighbors. When the screen lit up again, it showed my own home. The door opened to reveal the hallway to the dining room, where I could see my wife sewing a patch on my son's pants. Then I saw my daughter experimenting on fudge in the food laboratory and my boy working on a bomb model. What surprised me most was a picture of myself staring at myself on the screen.

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This wasn't very interesting to me, so I tried some of the other stations. No matter where I tuned in, though, I found myself looking at a part of my own home. I wrote a letter of complaint to the Universal Program Commission, but never even got an answer.

7

I AM sorry that I do not remember my name. I have been employed a long time in the Classified Laboratory of Theoretical Physics and have been under security orders to speak to no one except in answer to official queries. As I am the only scholar in my field—the polarity of the positron—I have never been asked for information. If I had been, perhaps I would not have forgotten my name, but I cannot be sure. I don't know whether the replies are signed.

I could have prevented the Calamity. I tried. I risked my life in the attempt. But at the moment when it seemed I might succeed, something happened which I must try to explain.

First let me tell you why I knew what would happen.

My studies of minute particles let me to believe that machines might exert some form of choice. Simply because aggregates have always behaved predictably, I could not assume they always would. Even though the masses of men behaved as expected, I remember that, in my grandfather's time, individual persons frequently departed from established courses. What the individual could do, I felt the mass or the machine might do.

As you know, these were subversive views, running directly counter to the cult of the Statisticians, which was based entirely on the predictability of mass behavior.

The cult of the Statisticians was strong because it produced results. By employing Statisticians, the contending armies in the Peripheral Wars predicted each other's movements so accurately that they eliminated the possibility of surprise. Thus the Statisticians produced the military impasse which destroyed the prestige of political leadership. From that time on, Statisticians filled the posts of government.

The success of the Statisticians proved their undoing. They claimed that they could create a perfect system without conflict or accident. They fondly believed that with the feedback in the electron brain, they could anticipate and correct all deviations in behavior, human or mechanical.

They might have succeeded, if not for a fundamental error.

I discovered this error as soon

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as the plans for the fiscal century were published. The design of the electron brain had completely ignored the polarity of the positron. In the total fiscal complex, this factor permits any aggregate to choose its own course. But the error was not immediately obvious to the Statisticians. It remained subtle and concealed until multiplied beyond control.

NATURALLY, I prepared a report to predict to my chiefs the dangers embedded in this plan for a perfect world. I predicted that the machines would make their own decisions, even though most men long ago had lost that power. I even warned them that the ancient concept of "free will," now forbidden, would return to destroy them. These were the facts I offered.

The report was never delivered. I'd hardly put my seal on the document when the automatic security guard closed in. The document was seized and I was bound gagged and thrown onto a conveyor belt. I saw myself on the way to the eraser. Only the polarity of the positron saved me. Desperately, on my way out of the laboratory, I kicked a single switch.

Instead of taking me to my punishment, the conveyor belt converted itself into a joy ride. The gag fell out. My bonds dissolved. The Calamity had begun.

The joy ride carried me to witness many of the events reported to this Commission. And then it tossed me directly into the center of the office of the Chiefs. I had one more opportunity to tell my story, to save the system.

Given a second choice, I reconsidered.

Had a perfect system been to my taste, I'd have died cheerfully to save it. But the Calamity excited me. I relished its surprises and adventures, even its hazards. I remember the old peasant proverb, "When life is perfect, it is time to die." And I decided I'd rather live.

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: *At this point, the Commission abruptly closed its hearings. The unnamed physicist was charged with treason and ordered executed on the spot. His life was saved, however, by Rioters representing the New Disorder, which, upon seizing power, decreed that the Calamity should henceforth be called the Blessing.*

The physicist was rewarded by being made head of the government. He served two distinguished terms as President Nameless, which was the origin of the Presidential title of address, "Your Namelessness."

The Commission, of course, was sent to Erasure.

—MARK MEADOWS

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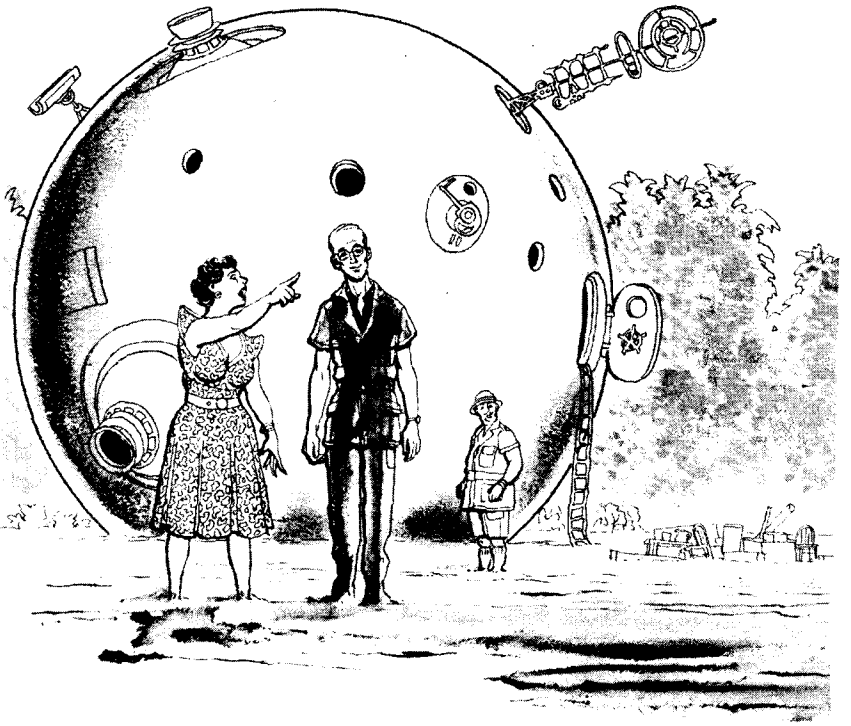
Collector's Item

Being trapped in the steaming h--l of Venus is no excuse for forgetting one's manners— but anyone abducted, marooned, tricked, kept from tea might well crack under the strain!

By EVELYN E. SMITH

Illustrated by EMSH



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"WHAT I should like to know," Professor Bernardi said, gazing pensively after the lizard-man as he bore the shrieking form of Miss Anspacher off in his scaly arms, "is whether he is planning to eat her or make love to her. Because, in the latter instance, I'm not sure we should interfere. It may be her only chance."

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"Carl!" his wife cried indignantly. "That's a horrid thing to say! You must rescue her at once!"

"Oh, I suppose so," he said, then gave his wife a nasty little grin that he knew would irritate her. "It isn't that she's unattractive, my dear, in case you hadn't noticed, though she's pretty well past the bloom of youth—"

"*Will* you stop making leering noises and go save her or *not?*"

"I was coming to that. It's just that she persists in using her Ph.D. as a club to beat men into respectful pulps. Men don't like being beaten into respectful pulps, whether by a man or a woman. Now if she'd only learned that other people have feelings—"

"If you don't stop lecturing and go, I will!" his wife threatened.

"All right, all right," he said wearily. "Come on, Mortland."

THE two scientists slogged through the steamy, odorous jungle of Venus and soon reached the lizard-man, who, weighed down by his captive, had not been able to travel as fast.

"You blast him," the professor told Mortland. "Try not to hit Miss Anspacher, if you can manage it."

"Er—I've never fired one of these things before," Mortland said. "Can't stand having my eardrums blasted. However, here goes." He pointed his weapon at the lizardlike creature in a gingerly manner. "Ah—hands up," he ordered. "Only fair to give the—well, blighter a sporting chance," he explained to Professor Bernardi.

To their amazement, the lizard-man promptly dropped Miss Anspacher into the lavender-colored mud and put up his hands. Miss Anspacher gave an indignant yelp.

"Seems intelligent in spite of the kidnaping," Mortland commented. "But how does he happen to understand English? We're the only expedition ever to have reached Venus . . . that I know of, anyway." He and the professor stared at each other in consternation. "There may have been a secret expedition previously and perhaps they left a—a base or something, which would explain why—"

"If you two oafs would stop speculating, you might help me out of here!" Miss Anspacher remarked in her customary snappish tone. Professor Bernardi leaped forward to obey. "You don't have to pull quite so hard! I haven't taken root yet!" She came out of the mud with a sound like two whales kissing. She brushed hopelessly at her once-white blouse and shorts.

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"Oh, dear, I look a mess!"

Professor Bernardi did not comment, being engaged in slapping at a small winged creature —about the size of a bluejay, but looking like a cross between a bat and a mosquito—that seemed interested in taking a bite out of him. It escaped his flapping hand and flew to the top of Mortland's sun helmet, where it glared at the professor.

"Since you seem to understand English," Miss Anspacher said to the lizard-man through a mouthful of hairpins, "perhaps you will be so kind as to explain the meaning of this outrage?"

"I was smitten," the alien replied suavely. "Passion made me forget myself."

Professor Bernardi looked thoughtfully at him. "A prior expedition isn't the answer. It wouldn't have troubled to educate you so thoroughly. Therefore, the explanation is that you pick up English by reading our minds. Correct?"

The lizard-man turned an embarrassed olive. "Yes."

NOW that he was able to give the creature a more thorough inspection, Bernardi saw that he really didn't look too much like a lizard. He definitely appeared to be wearing clothes of some kind, which, in the Venusian heat, indicated a particularly refined degree of civilization —unless, of course, the squamous skin protected him from the heat as well as the humidity.

More than that, though, he was humanoid in almost a Hollywood way. He had a particularly fine profile and an athletic physique, which, oddly, his scales seemed to enhance, much like a movie idol dressed in fine-meshed Medieval armor. Naturally, he had a tail, but it was as well proportioned as a kangaroo's, though shorter and more graceful, and it struck Professor Bernardi as a particularly handsome and useful gadget.

For one thing, the people from Earth were standing uncomfortably in the slippery mud, while the lizard-man was using his tail much in the fashion of a spectator stool, leaning back against it almost in a sitting position, with his armor-shod feet supporting him comfortably. For another, the tail undoubtedly served for balance and the added push of a walking stick and perhaps for swift attack or getaway. Very practical and attractive, the professor concluded—too bad Man had relinquished his tail when climbing down from the trees.

"Thank you," the saurian said with uneasy modesty, looking at him. "Good of you to think so. You are a fairly intelligent species, aren't you?"

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"Fairly," the professor acknowledged, preoccupied with a clever idea. Perhaps existence on Venus wasn't going to be as unpleasant as he had anticipated. "From reading my mind, you know what this blaster can do, don't you?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Then you know what I expect of you?"

"Yes, sahib. I'se comin', massa. To hear is to obey, effendi." The creature turned and went briskly back toward the camp, leaving the others to stumble after him.

Mrs. Bernardi gave a shriek as his handsome scaled form emerged from the greenish-white underbrush, haloed in luminous yellow mist. Algol, the ship's cat, prudently took sanctuary behind her, then peered out to see what was going on and whether there was likely to be anything in it for him.

"This is our native bearer," Professor Bernardi explained as the three scientists burst out of the jungle.

"My name is Jrann-Pttt." The creature bowed low. "At your service, madame."

"Oh, Carl!" Mrs. Bernardi clapped her hands. "He's just perfect! So thoughtful of you to find one that speaks English! I do hope you can cook, Pitt?"

"I will do my best, madame."

ALGOL daintily picked his way through the mud toward the saurian, sniffed him with judicial deliberation; then, deciding that anyone who smelled so much like the better class of fish must be All Right, rubbed against his legs.

"Well," remarked Miss Anspacher, using the side of the spaceship as a mirror by which to redden her somewhat prissy lips, "that makes it practically unanimous, doesn't it?"

"All except Professor Bernardi," said Jrann-Pttt, looking at the scientist with what might have been a smile. "He doesn't like me."

"I see that your telepathic powers are not quite accurate," the professor returned. "I do not dislike you; I distrust you."

"The fact that the two terms are not entirely synonymous in your language would argue a certain degree of incipient civilization," the lizard-man observed.

"You know, Carl," Mrs. Bernardi whispered, "he has an awfully funny way of talking, for a native."

"Frankly I don't like this at all, Professor," Captain Greenfield said, mopping his brow with a limp handkerchief. "If I hadn't been off looking for a better berth for the ship—all this mud worries me—this'd never have happened."

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"You mean you would have let the lizard get away with Miss Anspacher?"

The big man's face flushed crimson. "I don't think that's funny, Professor."

Bernardi quickly changed the subject, for he realized that the captain, being by far the most muscular of the party, was not a man to trifle with. "Tell me, Greenfield, did you succeed in finding a better spot for the ship? I must admit I'm worried about that mud myself."

"Only remotely dry spot around is an outcropping 'bout two kilometers away," Greenfield said grudgingly. He shifted his camp stool in a futile search for shade. Even though the sun never penetrated the thick layer of clouds, the yellow light diffused through them was blinding. "Might be big enough, but it's not level. Could blast it smooth, but that'd take at least a week—Earth time."

Bernardi pulled his damp shirt away from his body. "Well, I daresay we'll be all right where we are, if we're not assailed by any violent forces of nature. On Earth, this might be a monsoon climate."

"If you ask me, that monster is more of a danger than any monsoon."

Bernardi sighed. Although by far the most competent officer available for the job of spaceship captain, Greenfield was not quite the man he would have chosen to be his associate for months on end. Still, beggars—as Miss Anspacher might have eloquently put it—could not be choosers. "What makes you say that?" he asked, trying to set an example of tolerance.

"Don't like the idea of him cooking for us," the captain said stubbornly. "Might poison us all in our beds."

"Well, don't eat in your bed," suggested Mortland, strolling out of the airlock in the company of the cat. Algol, however, finding that the spot beside the captain's camp stool was as dry as anything could be on Venus, decided to turn back.

"THE difficulty is easily overcome, Captain," the professor said, still holding on to his patience. "You can continue to cook your own meals from the tinned and packaged foods on board ship. The rest of us will eat fresh native foods prepared by Jrann-Pttt."

"But why," Miss Anspacher interrupted as she emerged from the airlock with a large cast-iron skillet, "should you think Jrann-Pttt wants to poison us?"

Both men rose from their stools. "Stands to reason he'd consider us his enemies, Miss

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Anspacher," the captain said. "After all, we—as a group, that is—captured him."

"Hired him," Professor Bernardi contradicted. "I've telepathically arranged to pay him an adequate salary. In goods, of course; I don't suppose our money would be of much use to him. And I think he's rather glad of the chance to hang around and observe us conveniently."

"Observe us!" Greenfield exclaimed. "You mean he's spying out the land for an attack? Let's prepare our defenses at once!"

"I doubt if that's what he has in mind," Professor Bernardi said judiciously.

"He may be staying because he wants to be near me," Miss Anspacher blurted. Overcome by this unmaidenly admission, she reddened and rushed from them, calling, "Yoo-hoo, Jrann-Pttt! Here is the frying pan!" Algol woke up instantly and followed her. "Frying" was one of the more important words in his vocabulary.

Captain Greenfield stared across the clearing after them, then turned back to Bernardi with a frown. "I don't like to see one of our girls mixed up with a lizard—and a foreign lizard at that." But his face too clearly betrayed a personal resentment.

"Don't tell me you have a—a fondness for Miss Anspacher, Captain," Professor Bernardi exclaimed, genuinely surprised. Undeniably Miss Anspacher — although no longer in her first youth—was a handsome woman, but he would not have expected her somewhat cerebral type to appeal to the captain. On the other hand, she was the only unattached woman in the party and they were a long way from home.

Greenfield picked a fleck of dried violet mud from the side of the ship and avoided Bernardi's eye. "One of the reasons I came along," he said almost bashfully. "Thought I'd have the chance to be alone with her now and again and impress her with, with. . ."

"Your sterling qualities?" Bernardi suggested.

The captain flashed him a glance of mingled gratitude and resentment. "And now this damned lizard has to come along!"

"Cheer up, Captain," said the professor. "I'll back you against a lizard any time."

ALTHOUGH the long twilight of Venus had deepened into night and it could never really be cool there by terrestrial standards, the temperature was almost comfortable. Everything was quite black, except for the pallid purple campfire glowing through the darkness; the clouds that

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perpetually covered the surface of the planet prevented even the light of the stars from reaching it.

"Tell me more about the cross- versus the parallel-cousin relationships in your culture, Jrann-Pttt," Miss Anspacher breathed, wriggling her camp stool closer to the saurian's. "Anthropology is a great hobby of mine, you know. How do your people feel about exogamy?"

"I'm afraid I'm rather exhausted, dear lady," he said, using one arm to mask a yawn, and one to surreptitiously wave away the saurian head that was peering out of the underbrush. "I shouldn't like to give a scientist like yourself any misinformation that might become a matter of record."

"Of course not," she murmured. "You're so considerate."

A pale face appeared in the firelight like some weird creature of darkness. Terrestrial and extraterrestrial both started. "Miss Anspacher," the captain growled, "I'd like to lock up the ship, so if you wouldn't mind turning in—"

Miss Anspacher pouted. "You've interrupted such an interesting conversation. And I don't see why you have to lock up the ship. After all, the night is three hundred and eighty-five hours long. We don't sleep all that time and it would be a shame to be cooped up."

"I'm going to try to rig up some floodlights," Greenfield explained stiffly, "so we won't be caught like this again. Nobody bothered to tell me the day equals thirty-two of ours, so that half of it would be night."

"Then I won't see you for almost two weeks of our time, Jrann-Pttt? Are you sure you wouldn't like to spend the rest of the night in our ship? Plenty of room, you know."

"No, thank you, dear lady. The jungle is my natural habitat. I should feel stultified by walls and a ceiling. Don't worry —I shan't run away."

"Oh, I'm not worried," Miss Anspacher said coyly, throwing a stick of wood on the fire.

"Small riddance if he does."

"Captain Greenfield!"

That part of the captain's face not concealed by his piratical black beard turned red. "Well, if he can read our minds, he knows damn well what I'm thinking, anyway, so why be hypocritical about it?"

"That's right—he is a telepath, isn't he?" Miss Anspacher's face grew even redder than the captain's. "I forgot he. . . It *is* getting late. I really must go. Good night, Jrann-Pttt."

"Good night, dear lady." The saurian bowed low over her hand.

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Leaning on the captain's brawny arm, Miss Anspacher ploughed through the mud to the ship, followed by the mosquito-bat and Algol, who had been toasting themselves more or less companionably at the fire. The door to the airlock clanged behind all four of them.

THE other saurian's head appeared again from the bush. *Jrann-Pttt,* the insistent thought came, *shall I rescue you now?*

Why, Dfar-Lll? I am not a prisoner. I'm quite free to come and go as I please. But let's get away from the strangers' ship while we communicate. They do have a certain amount of low-grade perception and might be able to sense the presence of another personality. At any rate, they might look out of a port and see you.

Keeping the illuminator on low beam, Dfar-Lll led the way through the bushes. *Seems to me you're going to an awful lot of trouble just to get zoo specimens,* the youngster protested, disentangling its arms from the embrace of an amorous vine. *There's really no reason for carrying on the work since Lieutenant Merglyt-Ruuu . . . passed on.*

Jrann-Pttt sat down on a fallen log and, tucking up his graceful tail, signaled his junior to join him. *In the event that we do decide to return to base, some handsome specimens might serve to offset the lieutenant's demise.*

Return to base? But I thought we were . . .

We haven't found swamp life pleasant, have we? After all, there's no real reason why we shouldn't go back. Is it our fault that Merglyt-Ruuu happened to meet with a fatal accident?

We-ell . . . but will the commandant see it that way?

On the other hand, if we don't go back, wouldn't it be a good idea to attach ourselves to an expedition that, no matter how alien, is better equipped for survival than we? And carrying out our original purpose seemed the best way of getting to meet these strangers informally, as it were.

They are unquestionably intelligent life-forms then?

After a fashion. Jrann-Pttt yawned and rose. *But why are we sitting here? Let's start back to our camp. We will be able to converse more comfortably.*

They made their way through the jungle—now walking, now wading where the mud became water. Small creatures with hardly any thoughts scurried before them as they went.

The commandant may have already made contact with their rulers, Dfar-Lll suggested, springing forward to illuminate the way. *In that case, we couldn't*

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hope to remain undiscovered for long.

Oh, these creatures are not Venusians. There's no intelligent life here. They hail from the third planet of this system and, according to their thoughts, this is the only vessel that was capable of traversing interplanetary space. So we needn't worry about extradition treaties or any other official annoyances.

If they're friendly, why didn't you spend the night in their ship? It certainly looks more comfortable than our collapsible moslak —which, by the way, collapsed while you were gone. I hope we'll be able to put it up again ourselves. I must say this for the lieutenant—he was good at that sort of thing.

Jrann-Pttt made a gesture of distaste. *He was unfortunately good at other things, too. But let's not discuss him. I'm not staying with the strangers because I want to pick up one or two little things—mostly some of our food to serve them. I used up all the supplies in my pack and I want them to think we're living off the land. They believe me to be a primitive and it's best that they should until I decide just how I'm going to make most efficient use of them. Besides, I didn't want to leave you alone.*

The younger saurian sniffed skeptically.

"HONESTLY, Pitt," Mrs. Bernardi said, keeping to leeward of the tablecloth the lizard-man was efficiently shaking out of the airlock, "I've never had a —an employee as competent as you." But the word she had in mind, of course, was "servant." "I do wish you'd come back to Earth with us."

"Perhaps you would compel me to come?" he suggested, as Algol and the mosquito-bat entered into hot competition to catch the crumbs before they sank into the purple ooze.

"Oh, no! We'd want you to come as our guest—our friend." *Naturally,* her thoughts ran, *a house guest would be expected to help with the washing up and lend a hand with the cooking—and, of course, we wouldn't have to pay him. Though my husband, I suppose, would requisition him as a specimen.*

I fully intend to go to Earth with them, Jrann-Pttt mused, *but certainly not in that capacity. Nor would I care to be a specimen. I must formulate some concrete plan.*

The captain was crawling on top of the spaceship, scraping off the dried mud, brushing away the leaves and dust that marred its shining purity. The hot, humid haze that poured down from the yellow clouds made the metal surface a little hell. Yet it was

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hardly less warm on the other side of the clearing, where Miss Anspacher tried desperately to write up her notes on a table that kept sinking into the spongy ground, and hindered by the thick wind that had arisen half an hour before and which kept blowing her papers off. The sweet odor of the flowers tucked in the open neck of her already grimy white blouse suddenly sickened her and she flung them into the mud.

"We won't be going back to Earth for a long time!" she called. Gathering up the purple-stained papers, she came toward the others, little puffs of mist rising at each step. "We like it here. Lovely country."

How could she think to please even the savage she fancied him to be by such an inanity, Jrann-Pttt wondered. No one could possibly like that fetid swamp. Or was it not so much that she was trying to please him as convince herself? Was there some reason the terrestrials had for needing to like Venus. It hovered on the edge of the women's minds. If only it would emerge completely, he could pick it up, but it lurked in the shadows of their subconscious, tantalizing him.

"I'd like to know when we're going to start putting up the shelters," Mrs. Bernardi said, pushing a streak of fog-yellow hair out of her eyes. "I can't stand being cooped up for another night on that ship."

"You're planning to put up shelters—to live outside of the ship?" This would seem to confirm his darkest suspicions. Even a temporary settlement would leave them too open to visitation from the commandant. What his attitude toward the aliens might be, Jrann-Pttt didn't know. He might consider them as specimens, as enemies or as potential allies. What his attitude toward Jrann-Pttt and his companion would be, however, the saurian knew only too well. Had they reported the lieutenant's demise immediately, it was possible the commandant might have been brought to believe it was an accident. Now he would unquestionably think Jrann-Pttt had killed Merglyt-Ruuu on purpose—which was not true; how was Jrann-Pttt to know that the mud into which he'd knocked the lieutenant was quicksand?

"Anything against putting up shelters?" Captain Greenfield growled from his perch.

"Monster!" the mosquito-bat shrieked at the cat. "Monster! Monster!"

THERE was a painfully embarrassed silence.

"The creature is not intelligent," Jrann-Pttt explained,

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smiling. "It merely has vocal apparatus that can reproduce a frequently heard word, like—you have a bird, I believe, a—" he searched their minds for the word —a parrot."

"Monster!" the mosquito-bat continued. "Monster! Monster!"

"Shut up or I'll wring your neck!" the captain snarled. The mosquito-bat obeyed sullenly, apparently recognizing the threat in his tone.

But the concept of "monster" hung heavily in the air between the terrestrials and the lizard-man. *They should not feel so bad about it,* he thought, *for they are the monsters themselves. But that would never occur to them and I can hardly reassure them by saying . . .*

"Don't worry," Professor Bernardi said smoothly. "To him, it's we who are the monsters."

A sudden gust of wind nearly whipped the tablecloth out of Jrann-Pttt's hands. He fought with it for a moment, glad of something tangible to contend with. "About the shelters," he said. "They might not stand up against a storm."

"So this is monsoon country," Bernardi observed thoughtfully. "Do you know when the storms usually come, Jrann-Pttt?" The other shook his head. "Peculiar. There usually is a season for that sort of thing."

"I . . . come from another part of the planet."

"Storms here are bad, eh?" the captain commented, swinging himself down easily. "Frankly, that worries me. Ship's resting on mud as far as I can see, and if there's one thing I do know something about, it's mud. If it got any wetter, the ship might sink."

"Maybe we should leave," Mrs. Bernardi suggested. "Go to another part of the planet where it's drier, or—" she tried not to show the sudden surge of hope —"leave for home and come back after the rainy season."

There was a sudden silence, and Jrann-Pttt found himself able to pick up the answers to some of his questions from the alien minds. His worst fears were confirmed. Plan A was out. But something could still be done with these creatures.

"Doesn't she know?" the captain demanded accusingly. "You brought her here without telling her?"

Bernardi spread his hands wide in a futile gesture. "She should know; I've told her repeatedly. She just doesn't understand . . . or doesn't want to."

"I know they'll forgive us," Mrs. Bernardi said stubbornly. "We—you—haven't done anything really wrong, so how could they do anything terrible to us? After all, didn't they refuse you

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the funds because they said you couldn't—"

"Shhh, Louisa," her husband commanded.

Jrann-Pttt smiled to himself.

—"do it," she went on. "And you did. So they were wrong and they'll have to forgive us."

"Tcha!" Miss Anspacher said. "Since when was there any fairness in justice?"

"ON the other hand," Mrs. Bernardi continued, "we have no idea of how dangerous the storms here could be."

"Very dangerous," Jrann-Pttt said.

"For you, perhaps," the captain retorted. "Maybe not for us."

"Now that's silly," Miss Anspacher said. "You can see that Jrann-Pttt is much more—" she blushed —"sturdily built than we are."

"I don't mean that we could face it without protection," the captain replied angrily. "Naturally I mean that our superior technology could cope with the effects of any storm."

"Well, Captain, we'll have to put that superior technology to use at once," the professor told him. "You'd better start blasting that rock."

Laden with equipment and malevolent thoughts, the captain trudged off into the murky jungle. The others would not even offer to help. Confounded scientists; they certainly took his status as captain seriously. He wished, for a disloyal moment, that he had stayed on Earth. The quiet routine of a test pilot had prepared him for nothing like this. Were Miss Anspacher and adventure worth it? At the moment, he thought not. But he was on Venus and it was too late to change his mind.

Jrann-Pttt followed him into the jungle, keeping some distance behind, for he had good reason to suspect that Greenfield would take his warm interest in terrestrial technology for plain spying. Or, worse yet, he might try to press the lizard-man into service; Jrann-Pttt felt he had demeaned himself quite enough already.

"Have you noticed," Miss Anspacher asked, pushing the mass of damp brown hair off her neck as she came alongside him, "how the—the smell—" *a scientist does not mince words* —"of the swamp has grown stronger?"

Jrann-Pttt halted. He had a good idea of what the captain's reactions to the sight of himself and Miss Anspacher arriving hand-in-hand would be. "Yes, it is getting rather overpowering. Perhaps, for a lady of your delicate sensibilities, it would be best to—"

"I can stand a bad smell just

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as well as a male—any male!"

"Perhaps even better," Jrann-Pttt said, "for I was on the verge of turning back myself."

"Oh," she said, appeased. "Well, in that case, I'll go back with you . . . how quiet everything is!"

HE had not noticed. For him, it would never be quiet because of the stream of jangled thoughts constantly pouring into the back of his mind from everything sentient that surrounded him.

For a moment, he wondered what it would be like to be nontelepathic like the terrestrials, to have peace from the clamor of confused impressions, emotions and ideas that persistently beat at his mind. But that would be wondering how it was to be deaf to avoid discord, or blind to shut out ugliness.

"The lull before the storm, I suppose," she said brightly. *Now is his opportunity to kiss me—only perhaps they don't have kissing in his society. His mouth does seem to be the wrong shape. And if I kissed him, it might violate a taboo.*

During their short absence, the citrine clouds that closed off the sky had changed to a sinister umber. It was now almost as dusky in the clearing as in the jungle itself, when Jrann-Pttt and Miss Anspacher returned and joined the others.

Professor Bernardi stood looking up with sharp gray eyes at a sky he could not see. "I hope Greenfield can finish the blasting more quickly than he estimated," he muttered.

"Will we hear the noise way out here, Carl?" his wife worried nervously.

"Only two kilometers away? Of course we'll hear it. I do wish you wouldn't always be asking such stupid questions."

She shivered. "Well, I hope they get it over with right away. If we just have to sit here waiting and waiting and waiting, I'll go mad. I know I will."

"You should try to keep your nerves in check, Louisa," Miss Anspacher snapped. *Silly little fool.*

"At least I can control my glands!" Mrs. Bernardi flared back. *Sex-starved spinster.*

"I shall make some tea, ladies," Jrann-Pttt interposed. "I'm sure we will all feel the better for it."

Mrs. Bernardi smiled at him feebly. "You're such a comfort, Pitt. I don't know why you of all creatures should be the one to remind me of home."

"Home," remarked Mortland, emerging from the airlock, "is where the heart is. Did I hear someone say 'tea'?"

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AS Jrann-Pttt hung the kettle over the fire, suddenly the air erupted in stunning violence of sound. The ground undulated under their feet and water slopped out of the kettle, almost putting out the fire that rose high to claw at it. Rivulets of thick, muddy liquid welled out of the ground and drabbled their feet. The women turned pale. Algol gave a faint cry and hid under Mrs. Bernardi's skirts, trembling, while the mosquito-bat tried to lift Mortland's toupee and hide in his hair. The ship itself quivered and seemed to jump slightly in the air, then returned to its resting place.

All was quiet again, quieter than it had been before. Mortland anxiously gnawed his light mustache. "Better hurry with that tea, there's a good fellow. I'm violently allergic to loud noises."

"They'll probably continue all day," the professor said with almost malevolent cheerfulness, "so you might as well get used to them." *Who is he to have nerves? I am easily the most sensitive person here, but I manage to control myself.*

"I don't know how I'm going to stand it!" Mrs. Bernardi shrieked. "I just know something terrible is going to happen."

"Please try to restrain yourself, Louisa," her husband ordered. "After it's over, you'll find we'll be much more comfortable and secure with the ship resting on rock."

"If you ask me, that blast made it sink a little," Mortland said. "I wonder whether—"

He was interrupted by a thrashing in the bushes. Dfar-Lll burst forth, shedding scales. *Do not despair, Jrann-Pttt. I am here, ready to save you or die at your side.*

The women clutched each other, Miss Anspacher praying silently and fervently to Juno, Lakshmi, Freya, Isis and a host of other esoteric female deities she had picked up in the course of her avocational researches.

"He seems to be one of Jrann-Pttt's people," Bernardi observed, "so there should be nothing to fear."

Dfar-Lll, you fool! Jrann-Pttt ideated angrily. *Nothing's wrong. They're just blasting out a better berth for their vessel. And now you've spoiled my plans.*

"What did you think at that poor little creature!" Mrs. Bernardi blazed. "He's crying!" And, sure enough, amethyst tears were oozing out of the young saurian's large, liquid eyes.

I du-didn't mean any harm.

"Monster!" Mrs. Bernardi accused Jrann-Pttt. "All men are monsters, whether they're aliens or not."

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"You're so right, Louisa!" Miss Anspacher exclaimed, regarding the younger creature in an almost kindly manner.

I'm sorry, r-Lll, Jrann-Pttt apologized. *I was upset by that noise, too. How could you possibly know what it was? Come, let me introduce you to the creatures.*

DFAR-LLL stepped forward diffidently. Jrann-Pttt put a hand on the moss-green shoulder. "Allow me to introduce my companion, Dfar-Lll," he said aloud.

The youngster looked at him.

Mrs. Bernardi thrust out her hand. "I'm very glad to meet you, Lil."

Agitate it with one of yours. It's a courtesy. Don't let her see how repulsive she is to you. Remember, you're just as repulsive to her.

Dfar-Lll offered a shy, seven-fingered hand. "Pleased . . . to meet you . . . ma'am," the young lizard squeaked.

"Why, he's just a baby, isn't he?" Mrs. Bernardi asked.

I am not a baby! Dfar-Lll thought indignantly. *At the end of this year, I shall celebrate my pre-maturity feast, or I would have. And furthermore—*

There was another thunderous blast of sound. After the ground had stopped trembling, the six found themselves ankle-deep in muddy water. Algol, who was in considerably deeper than his ankles, mewed fretfully. Mrs. Bernardi picked him up and comforted him.

"Perhaps blasting wasn't such a good idea," the professor muttered. "Maybe I should tell Greenfield to call a halt and we'll take our chances with the storm. As a matter of fa—"

"The ship!" Mortland cried. "It *is* sinking!"

And the big metal ball slowly but visibly was indeed subsiding into the mud.

"Stop it, somebody!" Miss Anspacher snapped in her customary schoolroom manner.

The professor was pale, but he held on to his calm. "What can we do? Even if we could get the captain back in time, there's no way we can stop it. It's too heavy to pull out manually, and the engines, of course, are inside."

As they watched in horror, the ship sank deeper and deeper, picking up momentum as more of it went under. With a loud, sucking sound, it vanished into the ooze. Muddy water gurgled over it and, where the ship had been, there was now a small lake.

"This could be the beginning of a legend," Miss Anspacher murmured. "Or the end."

There was another vibrant detonation. "Someone ought to go

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tell the captain there's no use blasting any more," Bernardi said wearily. "We have nothing to put on the rock when he smooths it off." He began to laugh. "I suppose you could call this poetic justice." And he went on laughing, losing a bit of his former self-control.

There goes Plan B, Jrann-Pttt thought.

A star of intensely bright green lightning split the clouds and widened to cover the visible expanse of sky. There was a planet-shaking clap of thunder that made Greenfield's puny efforts sound like the snapping of twigs in comparison and it began to rain hard and fast.

"IF only I hadn't gone and blasted that damn rock," the captain grumbled, squeezing water out of his shirt-tails, "we'd have been all right. Probably the storm wouldn't have done a thing to the ship except get it wet. If you can even call it a storm."

"I can and I do," Jrann-Pttt replied, haughtily squeegeeing his wet scales. "All I said was that a storm might be coming up and it might be dangerous. How was I to know it would last only half an hour?"

"Even the camp stools pulled through," Greenfield pointed out, "and you said shelters wouldn't stand up."

"I only said they might not. Can't you understand your own language?"

The fissure in the clouds had not quite closed yet and through it the enormous, blazing disk of the sun glared at them, twice as large as it appeared from Earth. It was a moot point as to whether they'd be dried out or steamed alive first.

"Might as well collect whatever gear we have left and get it to higher ground," Miss Anspacher said efficiently. "Two feet of water won't do anything any good—even those camp stools."

"It's my belief you wanted this to happen," Greenfield accused Jrann-Pttt. "You wanted to get rid of us."

"My dear fellow," Jrann-Pttt replied loftily, "the information I gave you was, to the best of my knowledge, accurate. However, I happen to be a professor of zoology and not a meteorologist. Apparently you people live out in the open like primitives," he continued, ignoring Dfar-Lll's admiring interjection, "and are accustomed to the vicissitudes of weather. I am a civilized creature; I live—" *or used to live* —"in an air-conditioned, light-conditioned, weather-conditioned city. It is only when I rough it on field trips like this to trackless parts of the—globe that I am forced to experience weather.

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Even then, I have never before been caught in a situation like this."

In fact, I was never before caught or I wouldn't be in this situation at all.

"Oh, Jrann-Pttt," sighed Miss Anspacher, "I knew you couldn't be just an ordinary native!"

"How did you get into this situation then?" Professor Bernardi asked. He had an unfortunate talent for going directly to the point.

"The third member of our expedition died," Jrann-Pttt explained. "He was our dirigational expert. Our guide."

"How did he happen to—"

"Are we just going to stand here chatting," Miss Anspacher demanded, "or are we going to do something about this?"

"What can we do?" Mrs. Bernardi asked weakly. "We might just as well lie down and—"

"Never say die, Louisa," Miss Anspacher admonished.

"I suggest we go to my camp to see what shape it's in," Jrann-Pttt said, furiously putting together Plan C. "Some of the supplies there might prove useful."

Captain Greenfield looked questioningly at Bernardi. The professor shrugged. "Might as well."

"All right," the captain growled. "Let's pick up whatever we can save."

SINCE there wasn't much that could be rescued, the little safari was soon on its way. Jrann-Pttt led, carrying Algol in his arms. Behind came Mortland, bearing a camp stool and the kettle into which he had tucked a tin of biscuits and into which the mosquito-bat had tucked itself, its orange eyes glaring out angrily from beneath the lid. Next came Mrs. Bernardi with her knitting, her camp stool and her sorrow.

Dfar-Lll followed with two stools and the plastic tea set. Close behind was Miss Anspacher, with the sugar bowl, the earthenware teapot and an immense bound volume of the *Proceedings of the Physical Society of Ameranglis* for 1993. Professor Bernardi bore a briefcase full of notes and the table. The rain had damaged the latter's mechanism, so that its legs kept unfolding from time to time, to the great inconvenience of Captain Greenfield, who brought up the rear with the blasting equipment. Behind them and sometimes alongside them came something —or someone—else.

"Surely your camp must have been closer to ours than this," Miss Anspacher finally remarked after they had been slogging through mud and water and pushing aside reluctant vegetation for over an Earth hour.

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"I am very much afraid," Jrann-Pttt admitted, "that our camp has been lost—that is to say, inundated."

"What are we going to do now?" the captain asked of the company at large.

Professor Bernardi shrugged. "Our only course would seem to be making for one of the cities and throwing ourselves upon the na— Jrann-Pttt's people's hospitality. If Professor Jrann-Pttt has even the vaguest idea of the direction in which his home lies, we might as well head that way." *I wonder whether the natives could help us raise the ship.*

"I'm sure my people will be more than happy to welcome you," Jrann-Pttt said smoothly, "and to make you comfortable until your people send another ship to fetch you."

The terrestrials looked at one another. Dfar-Lll looked at Jrann-Pttt.

Professor Bernardi coughed. "That was the only spaceship we had," he admitted. "The first experimental model, you know." *We don't expect to stay on this awful planet forever. After all, as Louisa says, the government will*

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have to forgive us. Public opinion and all that.

"Oh," the saurian said. "Then we shall have the pleasure of your company until they build another?"

There was silence. "We have the only plans," the professor said, gripping his briefcase more tightly. "I am the inventor of the ship, so naturally I would have them." *If we brought back some specimens of Venusian life —of intelligent Venusian life— to prove we'd been here . . .*

"Matter of fact, old fellow," Mortland said, "we took all the plans with us so they couldn't build another ship and follow—"

"Mortland!" the professor exclaimed.

"But they're telepaths," Miss Anspacher said. "They must know already."

EVERYONE turned to look at the saurians.

"I have . . . certain information," Jrann-Pttt admitted, "but I cannot understand it. You are in trouble with your rulers because they would not give you the funds, claiming space travel was impossible?"

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"That's right," Bernardi said. *Not really specimens, you understand. Guests.*

"And you went ahead and appropriated the funds and materials from your government, since you were in a trusted position where you could do so?"

Bernardi nodded.

"Of course the question is now academic, for the ship is gone, but since you proved the possibility of space travel by coming here, wouldn't your government then dismiss the charges against you?"

"That's exactly what I keep telling him!" Mrs. Bernardi exclaimed.

But her husband shook his head. "The law is inflexible. We have broken it and must be punished, even if by breaking it we proved its fundamental error." *Why let him know our plans?*

Why, Jrann-Pttt, that sounds just like our own government, doesn't it?

Yes, it does. We should be able to establish a very satisfactory mode of living with these strangers.

"We'd hoped that after a year or so the whole thing would die down," Mortland explained frankly, "and we'd go back as heroes."

"Do you know the way to your home, Jrann-Pttt?" the professor asked anxiously.

"Since we were able to catch a glimpse of the sun, I think I can figure out roughly where we are. All we must do is walk some two hundred kilometers in that direction—" he waved an arm to indicate the way —"and we should be at the capital."

"Will your people accept us as refugees?" Miss Anspacher demanded bluntly, "or will we be captives?" *Which is what I'll bet the good professor is planning for you, if only he can figure some way to get you and, of course, ourselves back.*

"WE should be proud to accept you as citizens and to receive the benefits of your splendid technology. Our laboratories will be placed at your disposal."

"Well, that's better than we hoped for," the professor said, brightening. "We had expected to have to carve our own laboratories out of the wilderness. Now we shall be able to carry on our researches in comfort." *No need to trouble the natives; we'll be able to raise the ship ourselves. Or build a new one. And I'll see to it personally that they have special quarters in the zoo with a considerable amount of privacy.*

"If I were you, I wouldn't trust him too far," the captain warned. "He's a foreigner."

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"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Captain!" Miss Anspacher said. "I, for one, trust Jrann-Pttt implicitly. Did you say this direction, Jrann-Pttt?" She stepped forward briskly. There was a loud splash and water closed over her head.

CAPTAIN Greenfield rushed forward to haul her out. "Well," she said, daintily coughing up mud, "I was wet to begin with, anyway."

"You're a brave little woman, Miss Anspacher," the captain told her admiringly.

"This sort of thing may present a problem," Professor Bernardi commented. "I hope that was only a pot-hole, that the water is not going to be consistently too deep for wading."

"There might be quicksand, too," Mrs. Bernardi said somberly. "In quicksand, one drowns slowly."

Dfar-Lll gave a start. *Surely you don't intend to lead them back to base?*

Precisely. The swamp is unfit for settlement.

But to return voluntarily to captivity?

Who mentioned anything about captivity? Assisted by our new friends, we have an excellent chance of taking over the ship and supplies by a surprise attack.

But why should these aliens assist us?

Jrann-Pttt smiled. *Oh, I think they will. Yes, I have every confidence in Plan C.*

"I suggest," the professor said, ignoring his wife's pessimism, "that each one of us pull a branch from a tree. We can test the ground before we step on it, to make sure that there is solid footing underneath."

"Good idea," the captain approved. He reached out the arm that was not occupied with Miss Anspacher and tugged at a tree limb.

And then he and the lady physicist were both floundering in the ooze.

"Well, really, Captain Greenfield!" she cried, refusing his aid in extricating herself. "I always thought you were at least a gentleman in spite of your illiteracy!"

"Wha—what happened?" he asked as he struggled out of the mud. "Something pushed me; I swear it."

JRANN-PTTT mentalized. "It seems the tree did not like your trying to remove a branch."

"The tree!" Greenfield's pale blue eyes bulged. "You're joking!"

"Not at all. As a matter of fact, I myself have been wondering why there were so many

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thought-streams and yet so few animals around here. It never occurred to me that the vegetation could be sentient and have such strong emotive defenses. In all my experience as a botanist, I—"

"I thought you were a zoologist," Bernardi interrupted.

"My people do not believe in excessive specialization," the saurian replied.

"Trees that think?" Mortland inquired incredulously.

"They're not very bright," Jrann-Pttt explained, "but they don't like having their limbs pulled off. I don't suppose you would, either, for that matter."

"I propose," Miss Anspacher said, shaking out her wet hair, "that we break up the camp stools and use the sticks instead of branches to help us along."

"Good idea," the captain said, trying to get back into her good graces. "I always knew women could put their brains to use if they tried."

She glared at him.

"I thought we'd use the furniture to make a fire later," Mortland complained. "For tea, you know."

"The ground's much too wet," Professor Bernardi replied.

"And besides," Miss Anspacher added, "I lost the teapot in that pot-hole."

"But you managed to save the *Proceedings of the Physical Society*," Mortland snarled. "Serve you right if I eat it. And I warn you, if hard-pressed, I shall."

"How will we cook our food, though?" Mrs. Bernardi demanded apprehensively. "It's a lucky thing, Mr. Pitt, that we have you with us to tell us which of the berries and things are edible, so at least we shan't starve."

The visible portion of Jrann-Pttt's well-knit form turned deeper green. "But I regret to say I don't know, Mrs. Bernardi. Those 'native' foods I served you were all synthetics from our personal stores. I never tasted natural foods before I met you."

"And if the trees don't like our taking their branches," Miss Anspacher put in, "I don't suppose the bushes would like our taking their berries. Louisa, don't do that!"

But Mrs. Bernardi, with her usual disregard for orders, had fainted into the mud. Pulling her out and reviving her caused so much confusion, it wasn't until then that they discovered Algol had disappeared.

THE party had been trudging through mud and water and struggling with pale, malevolent vines and bushes and low-hanging branches for close to six Earth hours. All of them were tired and hungry, now that their meager

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supply of biscuits and chocolate was gone.

"Remember, Carl," Mrs. Bernardi told her husband, "I forgive you. And I know I'm being foolishly sentimental, but if you could manage to take my body back to Earth—"

"Don't be so pessimistic." Professor Bernardi absent-mindedly leaned against a tree, then recoiled as he remembered it might resent being treated like an inanimate object. "In any case, we'll most likely all die at the same time."

"I never did want to go to Venus, really," Mrs. Bernardi sniffled. "I only came, like Algol did, because I didn't have any choice. If you left me behind, I'd have had to bear the brunt of . . . Where is Algol?" She stared at Jrann-Pttt. "You were carrying him. What have you done with him?"

The lizard-man looked at her in consternation. "He jumped out of my arms when you fainted and I turned back to help. I was certain one of the others had him."

"He's dead!" she wailed. "You let him fall into the water and drown—an innocent kitty that never hurt anybody, except in fun."

"Come, come, Louisa." Her husband took her arm. "He was only a cat. I'm sure Jrann-Pttt didn't mean for him to drown. He was just so upset by your fainting that he didn't think . . ."

"Not Jrann-Pttt's fault, of course," Miss Anspacher said.

"After all, we can't expect them to love animals as we do. But Algol was a very good sort of cat . . ."

"Keep quiet, all of you!" Jrann-Pttt shouted. "I have never known any species to use any method of communication so much in order to communicate so little. Don't you understand? I would not have assumed the cat was with one of you, if I had not subconsciously sensed his thought-stream all along. He must be nearby."

Everyone was still, while Jrann-Pttt probed the dense underbrush that blocked their view on both sides. "Over here," he announced, and led the way through the thick screen of interlaced bushes and vines on the left.

About ten meters farther on, the ground sloped up sharply to form a ridge rising a meter and a half above the rest of the terrain. The water had not reached its blunted top, and on this fairly level strip of ground, perhaps three meters wide, Algol had been paralleling their path in dry-pawed comfort.

"Scientists!" Louisa Bernardi almost spat. "Professors! We could have been walking on that,

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too. But did anybody think to look for dry ground? No! It was wet in one place, so it would be wet in another. Oh, Algol—" she reached over to embrace the cat — "you're smarter than any so-called intelligent life-forms."

He indignantly straightened a whisker she had crumpled.

"LOOK," Mortland exclaimed in delight as they attained the top of the ridge, "here are some dryish twigs! Don't suppose the trees want them, since they've let them fall. If I can get a fire going, we could boil some swamp water and make tea. Nasty thought, but it's better than no tea at all. And how long can one go on living without tea?"

"We'll need some food before long, too," Professor Bernardi observed, putting his briefcase down on a fallen log. "The usual procedure, I believe, would be for us to draw straws to see which gets eaten—although there isn't any hurry."

"I'm glad then that we'll be able to have a fire," Mortland said, busily collecting twigs. "I should hate to have to eat you raw, Carl."

Mr. Pitt and his little friend are delightful creatures, Mrs. Bernardi thought. *So intelligent and so well behaved. But eating them wouldn't really be cannibalism. They aren't people.*

That premise works both ways, dear lady, Jrann-Pttt ideated. *And I must say your species will prove far easier to peel for the cooking pot.*

"Monster! What are you doing?" Mortland dropped his twigs and pulled the mosquito-bat away from a bush. "Don't eat those berries, you silly ass; the bush won't like it!" The mosquito-bat piped wrathfully.

Jrann-Pttt probed with intentness. "You know, I rather think the bush wants its berries to be eaten. Somthing to do with—er—propagating itself. Of course it has a false impression as to what is going to be done with the berries, but the important fact is that it won't put up any resistance."

"All right, old fellow." Mortland released the mosquito-bat, which promptly flew back to the bush. "I'm not the custodian of your morals."

"I wonder whether we could eat those berries, too," Professor Bernardi remarked pensively.

"Carl!" Mrs. Bernardi's tear-stained face flushed pink. "Why—why, that's almost indecent!"

"We eat beans, don't we?" Mortland pointed out. "They're seeds."

"We also eat meat," Miss Anspacher added.

There was silence. "I imagine,"

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Mrs. Bernardi murmured, "it's because we never get to meet the meat socially." She avoided the saurians' eyes.

"We'd better see how Monster makes out, though," Miss Anspacher observed, replenishing her lipstick, "before we try the berries ourselves. The fact that the bush is anxious to dispose of them doesn't mean they can't be poisonous."

"Why should Monster sacrifice himself for us?" Mortland retorted hotly, overlooking the fact that Monster's purpose in eating the berries was almost certainly not an altruistic one. "If we can risk his life, we can risk our own." He crammed a handful of berries into his mouth defiantly. "I say, they're good!"

Algol sniffed the bush with disgust, then turned away.

"See?" said Miss Anspacher. "They're undoubtedly poisonous. When he's really hungry, he isn't so fussy." She combed her hair.

"But is he really hungry?" Bernardi asked suspiciously. "Come here, Algol. Nice kitty." He bent down and sniffed the cat's breath. The cat sniffed his interestedly. Their whiskers touched. "I thought so. Fish!"

"YOU mean," Mrs. Bernardi shrieked, "that while we were struggling through that water, alternately starving and drowning by centimeters, that wretched cat has not only been walking along here dry as toast, but gorging himself on fish?"

"Now, now, Mrs. Bernardi," Jrann-Pttt said. "Being a dumb animal, he wouldn't think of informing you about matters of which he'd assume that you, as the superior beings, would be fully cognizant."

"You might have told us there were fish on this planet, Mr. Pitt."

"Dear lady, there is something I feel I should tell you. I am not—"

"They're here on the other side of the ridge," Greenfield called, bending over and peering through the foliage. "The fish, I mean."

"The pools look shallow," Bernardi said, also bending over. "The fish should be easy enough to catch. Might even be able to get them in our hands." He reached out to demonstrate, proving the error of both his theses, for the fish slipped right through his fingers and, as he grabbed for them, he lost his balance, toppled over the side of the ridge into the mud and water below and began to disappear, showing beyond a doubt that the pools were deeper than he had thought.

"Carl, what are you doing?" Mrs. Bernardi peered into the murky depths where her husband was threshing about. "Why don't

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you come out of that filthy mud?"

His voice, though muffled, was still acid. "It isn't mud, my dear. It's quicksand!"

"Rope!" the captain exclaimed, grabbing a coil.

"Hold on, chaps!" cried a squeaky voice. "I'm coming to the rescue!" A stout twelve-foot vine plunged out of the shadows and wrapped one end of itself around a tree—disregarding the latter's violent objections—and the other end around Professor Bernardi's thorax, which was just disappearing into the mud. "Now if one or two of you would haul away, we'll soon have him out all shipshape and proper. Heave ho! Don't be afraid of hurting me; my strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure."

"It's that vine!" Dfar-Lll exclaimed. "So that's what has been following us all along!"

"I CAN accept the idea of a vegetable's thinking," Professor Bernardi gasped as he was pulled out of the quicksand, "although with the utmost reluctance." He shook himself like a dog. "But how can it be mobile?"

"You chaps can move around," the vine explained, "so I said to myself: 'Dammit, I'll have a shot at doing that, too.' Hard going at first, when you're using suckers, but I persevered and I made it. Look, I can talk, too. Never heard of a vine doing that before, did you? Fact is, I hadn't thought of it before, but then I never had anyone to communicate with. All those other vines are so stupid; you have absolutely no idea! Hop you don't mind my picking up your language, but it was the only one around—"

"We are honored," Professor Bernardi declared. "And I am deeply grateful to you, too, sir or madam, for saving my life."

"Think nothing of it," the vine said, arranging its leaves, which were of a pleasing celadon rather than the whitish-green favored by the rest of the local vegetation. "Now that I can move, I'll probably be doing heroic things like that all the time. Are you all going to the city? May I go with you? I've heard lots about the city," it went on, taking consent for granted, "but I never thought I'd get to see it. Everybody in the swamp is such an old stick-in-the-mud. I thought I was trapped, too, forced to spend the rest of my life in a provincial environment. Is it true that the streets are filled with chlorophyll? Do you think I can get a job in a botanical garden or something? Perhaps I can give little talks on horticulture to visitors?"

The mosquito-bat looked out of the tea kettle austerely. "Mon-

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ster!" it piped shrilly.

"The very idea!" the vine snapped back indignantly. "Oh, well," it said, calming down, "you probably don't know any better. It's up to me as the intelligent life-form to forgive you, and I shall."

Jrann-Pttt and Dfar-Lll looked at each other in consternation. *Do you think there really are cities on this planet, sir? Can there be indigenous intelligent life? If so, it may have already got in touch with the commandant.*

Impossible, Jrann-Pttt replied. *The vine probably just heard us talking about a city. After all, it picked up the language that way; very likely it absorbed some terrestrial concepts along with it. If there are any real settlements at all, they must be quite primitive—nothing more than villages. No, it's we who will build the cities on Venus. Combining our technology with the terrestrials', we could develop a pretty little civilization here—after we've disposed of the commandant, so he can't report our disappearance. We don't want any publicity. So much better to keep our little society exclusive.*

"WONDER what time it is," the captain remarked as he rose and stretched in the dim yellow light of the long Venusian day. "Must have slept for hours. My watch seems to have stopped."

"Mine, too." Mortland unstrapped his from his wrist and shook it futilely. "Waterproof, hah! If we ever get back to Earth, I shall make the manufacturer eat his guarantee."

"Oh, well, what does time matter to us now?" Professor Bernardi pointed out as he rose from his leafy couch with a loud creak. All of them—even the saurians—had aches and pains in every joint and muscle as a result of the unaccustomed exercise and the damp climate. "We are out of its reach. It has no present meaning for us."

This depressed them all. Only the vine seemed in good health and spirits. "I notice you're all wearing clothes except for the short four-legged gentleman with the home-grown fur coat," it chattered happily. "Do you think I'll be socially acceptable without them? I wouldn't want to make a bad impression at the very start—or would leaves do?"

Everybody looked at Jrann-Pttt. "We are not a narrow-minded species," he said hastily. "I'm sure your leaves will be more than adequate."

After a breakfast of fish and berries stewed in tea—which the vine declined with thanks—the various members of the party

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gathered up their belongings and resumed their journey. Encrusted with dried purple mud and grime, their clothes deliberately torn by anti-social shrubbery, their chins—of the males, that is—disfigured by hirsute growths, the terrestrials made a sorry spectacle. It was hot, boiling hot, and more humid than ever.

"Well," said Miss Anspacher, letting the Swahili marching song with which she had been attempting to encourage the company peter out, "I do hope we'll reach your city soon, Jrann-Pttt. I must say I could use a hot bath." She added hastily, "Hot baths are a peculiar cultural trait of ours."

"I could use one myself," Jrann-Pttt said. He brushed his scales fastidiously.

"I'm looking forward so to meeting your relatives," she said, grabbing his left arm determinedly. "I'm not violating a taboo or anything, am I?" *It isn't really slimy; it just feels that way.*

"Not one of my people's. But I'm afraid you are violating a terrestrial taboo, judging from the thoughts I pick up from your captain's mind."

"Oh, him—he's a stupid fool!"

"Not at all. Rough, perhaps. Untutored, yes. But with a good deal of native intelligence, although fearfully primitive."

"Perhaps I was too harsh," Miss Anspacher observed thoughtfully. *The captain... is good-looking in a brutal sort of way, although not nearly as handsome or even as spiritual in appearance as Jrann-Pttt. And sometimes I almost think he*—she blushed to herself—*shows a certain partiality for my company.*

SHE did not, however, let go of the saurian's arm when the captain bustled up, prepared to put a stop to this, but tactfully, if possible, for he had begun to realize that his rude ways did not endear him to her.

"Ah—we're making very good progress, aren't we, Pitt?" he interrupted, trying to insinuate himself between the two.

"Excellent."

"How soon do you think we'll be at your city at this rate?"

Jrann-Pttt shrugged. "Since I have no way of telling what our rate is or how far we have gone, how can I tell? As a matter of fact, you might as well learn now as later—I am not a Venusian. There is no intelligent life native to Venus."

"Oh, really!" the vine interposed indignantly. "Saying a thing like that right in front of me! What would you call me, then, pray tell?"

Jrann-Pttt kept his actual thoughts to himself. "A muta-

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tion," he said. "Probably you are the first intelligent life-form to appear upon this planet. Scholarly volumes will be written about you."

"Oh?" The vine seemed to be appeased. "I accept your apology. Perhaps I'll learn to write and do the books myself, because I'm the only one who can understand the real me."

"But how can you show us the way to your city if you're not native to Venus?" Bernardi demanded, whirling fretfully upon the saurian. "What is this, anyway? Each time you come up with a different story!"

"See?" said the captain. "Didn't I tell you he was up to no good?"

"I should like to lead you to our base," Jrann-Pttt replied with quiet dignity. "I am telling you the truth now since I feel I should have your consent before proceeding farther."

??????? Dfar-Lll projected.

"I hesitated before, because I wasn't sure I could trust you. You see, the spaceship in which we came to this planet is a prison ship, with a crew consisting of malefactors—thieves, murderers, defrauders—dispatched to the remote fastnesses of the Galaxy to fetch back zoological specimens. Our zoo, I must say, is the finest and most interesting in the Universe."

"Monster!" the mosquito-bat squeaked.

"Shhh," Mortland admonished. "Don't interrupt."

"I was in command of our ill-fated expedition . . ."

Oh, Dfar-Lll projected. *For a moment there, sir, you had me worried.*

"When we reached Venus, I was, I must admit, careless. I gave the crew a chance to mutiny and they did. Slew most of the officers. Dfar-Lll and I were lucky to escape with our lives."

"But you might have told us!" Mrs. Bernardi's voice held reproach.

"Until we knew what kind of beings you were, we couldn't let you know how helpless and unprotected we were."

The women seemed moved, but not the men.

"Leading us on a wild goose chase, were you?" the captain challenged.

JRANN-PTTT drew a deep breath. "It was my hope that all of you would consent to help us get our ship back from these criminals. Then we could fly to my planet—which is the fifth of the star you know as Alpha Centauri—where, I assure you, you would be hospitably received."

We aren't really going back home, Jrann-Pttt, are we? I'd sooner stay here in the swamp

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than go back to that jail.

Have confidence in me, r-Lll. As soon as we have disposed of the commandant and his officers, I can put our ship out of commission. The terrestrials won't be able to tell what's wrong. They know nothing about space travel. The fact that they got their crude vessel to operate was probably sheer luck.

But the younger was not to be diverted. *Will we kill them after we've disposed of our officers? I should hate to.*

Certainly not. We shall need servants and I don't trust the prisoners in the ship—all criminals of the lowest type! Aloud, he said to the bewildered terrestrials, "If you don't want to help us, I shall understand. No sense your interfering in another species' quarrels, particularly as we must seem like monsters to you."

"Monster!" the mosquito-bat agreed. "Monster, monster, monster!" No one tried to stop him. Jrann-Pttt sensed that somehow he had lost a good deal of his grip on the terrestrials. Finesse, he thought angrily, was wasted on these barbaric life-forms.

Bernardi sighed. "I suppose we'll have to help you." *No reason why his ship shouldn't stop off at Earth before it goes to Alpha Centauri. No reason why it should even go to Alpha Centauri at all, in fact.*

"If you ask me," the captain said, "he's one of the criminals himself."

"But nobody asked you," Miss Anspacher retorted, the more acidly because she had been wondering the same thing. "Shall we resume our journey?"

"Hold on," the vine said. "I don't want to intrude or anything, but it hasn't been made quite clear to me whether or not I'm included in the invitation to this Alpha Centauri place, and I wouldn't want to keep going only on the off-chance that you might ask me. I really think you should, because you led me astray with your fair promises of glittering cities."

"The cities of our planet do not glitter," Jrann-Pttt replied, wishing it would wither instantly, "but certainly you are invited. Glad to have you."

"Oh, that's awfully decent of you," the vine said emotionally. "I shan't forget it, I promise you."

THEY plodded onward, the vine chattering so incessantly that a faint gurgling which accompanied them went unnoticed. The gurgling grew louder and louder as they pushed on. Finally, "I keep hearing water," Mortland remarked. "We must be approaching a river of some kind."

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A few minutes later, bursting through a screen of underbrush, they found themselves confronted by a river whose bubbling violet-blue waters extended for at least four kilometers from shadowy bank to bank, with the ridge tapering to a point almost in its exact center.

Apparently, while they had been trekking along the elevation, the surrounding terrain, concealed from them by the dense and evil-minded vegetation, had imperceptibly taken off, leaving the ridge to become a peninsula that jutted out into the river. They seemed to be stranded. All they could do was retrace their steps and, since they had no idea how far back the spit became part of the mainland again, the return journey might last almost as long as it had taken them to get there.

"I know we're heading in the right direction," Jrann-Pttt defended himself. "I wasn't aware of the river because we must have come by an overland route." Although he was telling the truth, at least insofar as he knew it himself, no one, not even Dfar-Lll, believed him.

"But let's rest a bit before we turn back," Mortland proposed, flopping to the ground. "I'm utterly used up."

"Maybe we don't need to go back," the vine said. "Not all the way, anyhow." Everyone stared. It waved its leaves brightly at them. "I notice the captain thoughtfully brought along lots of rope and there were scads of fallen logs just a bit back. Couldn't you just lash the logs together with the rope and make a—a thing on which we could float the rest of the way? On the water, you know."

The others continued to look at it open-mouthed.

"Just a little idea I had," it said modestly. "May not amount to much, but then you can't tell until you've tried, can you?"

"It — he — means a raft, I think," Mrs. Bernardi said.

Jrann-Pttt probed the raft concept in her mind, for he found the vegetable's mental processes curiously obscure. "What an excellent idea!" he exclaimed.

"It does not seem infeasible," Professor Bernardi admitted tightly. By now, he was suspicious of everyone and everything. *If I had never broached the idea of space travel to those peasants,* he thought, *I would be on Earth in the dubious comfort of my own home. That's what comes of trying to help humanity.*

"WELL," observed the captain as the heavy raft hit the water with a tremendous splash, "she seems to be riverworthy." He rubbed his hands in anticipa-

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tion, much of his surliness gone, now that he was about to deal with something he understood. "Since she is, in a manner of speaking, a ship, I suppose I assume command again?" He waited for objections, glancing involuntarily in Jrann-Pttt's direction. There were none. "Right," he said, repressing any outward symptoms of relief.

He efficiently deployed the personnel to the positions on the raft where he felt they might be least useless, the gear being piled in the middle and surmounted by Algol, who naturally assumed possession of the softest and safest place by the divine right of cats.

The captain does have a commanding presence, Miss Anspacher thought, *and a sort of uncouth grace. Moreover, he cannot read my mind—in fact, he often cannot even understand me when I speak.*

"All right!" he bellowed. "Cast off!"

The vine unfastened the rope that it had insouciantly attached to a tree trunk, remarking to the others, "Don't let the trees intimidate you. Actually their bark is worse than their bite." Now it dropped lithely on board the raft, looking for a comfortable resting place.

"Please don't twine around me," Miss Anspacher said coldly. "If you insist upon coming with us, you will have to choose an inanimate object to cling to."

"All right, all right," it tried to soothe her. "No need to get yourself all worked up over such a mere triviality, is there? I'll just coil myself tidily around one of those spare logs. I must say you're warmer, though."

Yes, she is, isn't she? thought the captain, and squeezed her hand.

THE raft drifted down the river. Since the current was flowing in the desired direction, there did not appear to be any need to use the poles, and everyone sat or reclined as comfortably as possible in the suffocating heat. The yellow haze had become so thick that they seemed to be at the bottom of a custard cup.

"I do hope we're heading the right way," Professor Bernardi said, *although who knows what is right and what is wrong any more?*

"Perhaps we aren't," Mrs. Bernardi mused, stroking Algol, who had crawled into her lap. "Perhaps we will go drifting along endlessly. Every sixteen days, it will get dark and every sixteen days it will get light, and meanwhile we will continue floating along, never going anywhere, never getting anywhere, never

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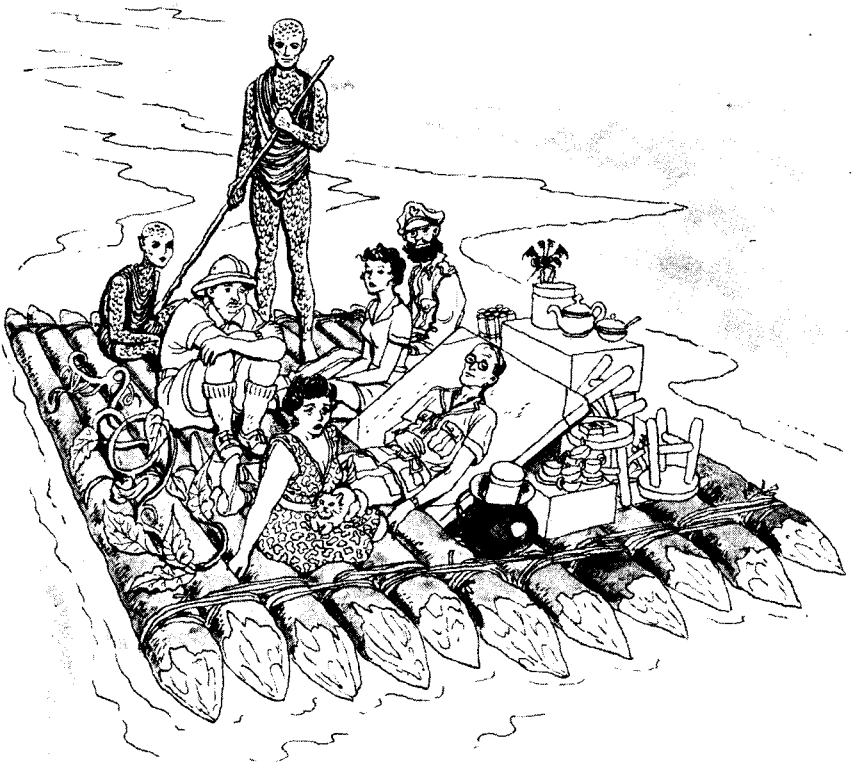
seeing anything but haze and raft and river and each other." Algol wheezed in his sleep.

"Nonsense!" Jrann-Pttt said rudely. "I have a compass. I know the direction perfectly well."

"And yet you let us think we were wandering about blindly." Miss Anspacher gave him a contemptuous look. The captain pressed her hand.

"Since you seem to breathe the same air and eat much the same food that we do, Mr. Pitt," Mrs. Bernardi changed her tack, "I suppose we'll be physically comfortable on your planet for the rest of our lives. Our children will be born there and our children's children, and eventually they'll forget all about Earth and think it was only a legend."

"But you did expect to settle permanently on Venus, didn't you?" the vine asked, bewilder-



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edly. "Or for a long visit, anyway. So I don't really see that it makes much difference if you go to Jrann-Pttt's Alpha Centauri place. So much nicer to be living with friends, I should think."

"But Alpha Centauri is so very far away," Mrs. Bernardi sighed. "There wouldn't be much chance of our ever getting back."

"Look!" Mortland exclaimed. "The river's branching. Which fork do we take?"

JRANN-PTTT, who had been dabbling his arms idly in the translucent violet-blue water, withdrew them hastily as nine green eyes, obviously belonging to the same individual, rose to the surface and regarded him with more than casual interest. He consulted his compass. "Left."

"Contrarily!" the mosquito-bat suddenly squeaked, pointing a small rod at his companions. "Rightward."

There was a stunned silence.

"Monster!" Mortland cried in reproach. "You can talk! How could you deceive us like that?"

"Can talk," the creature retorted. "Me not intelligent life-form, ha! Who talks last talks best. Have not linguistic facility of inferior life-forms, but can communicate rudely in your language."

"Remember," Mortland cautioned, "there are ladies present."

"Have been lying low and laughing to self—ha, ha!—at witlessness of lowerly life-forms."

"But why?" Mrs. Bernardi demanded distractedly. "Haven't we been kind to you?"

"You be likewise well treated in our zoo," it assured her. "All of you. Our zoo finest in Galaxy. And clean, too."

"Now really, sir, I must protest—" Professor Bernardi began, trying to extricate a blaster unobtrusively from the pile of gear in which the too-confident terrestrials had cached their weapons.

Monster gestured with his rod. "This is lethal weapon. Do not try hindrancing me. Hate damage fine specimens. Captain, go rightward."

"Oh, is that so!" Greenfield retorted hotly. "Let me tell you, you—you insect!"

"George!" Miss Anspacher clutched his arm. "Do what it says. For my sake, George!"

"Oh, all right," he muttered. "Just for you, then. Told you not to trust any of 'em," he went on, reluctantly poling the raft in the ordered direction. "Foreigners!"

"Fine zoo," the mosquito-bat insisted. "Very clean. Run with utmost efficientness. Strict visiting hours."

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"AND there goes Plan D," the vine said lightly. There was a hint of laughter in its voice. Jrann-Pttt stared at it in consternation. "Are you also from the Alpha Centauri system, sir?" It turned its attention to the mosquito-bat. "Naturally I'm curious to know where I'm going," it explained, "since I seem definitely to be included in your gracious invitation."

"Alpha Centauri, hah!" the mosquito-bat snorted. "I from what Earthlets laughingly term Sirius. Alpha Centauri merely little star."

"Now see here!" Jrann-Pttt sprang to his feet. Criminal he might be, but he was not going to there and have his sun insulted!

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" Miss Anspacher cried. "No use getting yourself killed, Jrann-Pttt!"

"Correctly," Monster approved. "Elementary intelligence displayed. Why damage fine specimens?"

From one prison into another, the saurian mentalized bitterly.

Yes, returned Dfar-Lll, *and it's all your fault.* The junior lizard burst into tears. *I wish I had let Merglyt-Ruuu do what he wanted. I would have been better off.*

"Sirius," the vine repeated. "That's even farther away than Alpha Centauri, isn't it? I never thought I would get that far away from the swamp! This really will be an adventure!"

"How do you know—" Professor Bernardi began.

"Frankly," it went on, "I don't see why you chaps are so put out by the whole thing. What's the difference between Alpha Centauri and Sirius anyway? Matter of a few light-years, but otherwise a star's a star for all that."

"To Jrann-Pttt, we wouldn't have been specimens," Mrs. Bernardi said, belatedly recognizing the advantages of Alpha Centauri.

"No, not specimens," the vine told her easily. "I don't suppose you know he had no intention of taking you back to his system. He wanted you to help him kill the officers of his ship so they couldn't look for him and the other escaped prisoner or report back to his planet. Then he was going to put the ship out of commission and found his own colony here with you as his slaves. I'd just as soon be a specimen as a slave. Sooner. Better to reign in a zoo than serve in a swamp!"

"Just how do you know all this?" Miss Anspacher demanded.

"It's obvious enough," Bernardi said gloomily. "Another telepath." *How can we compete or*

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even cope with creatures like these? What a fool I was to think I could outwit them.

"Telepathy just tricksomeness," the mosquito-bat put in jealously. "I have no telepathy, yet superior to all."

"BUT why should Mr. Pitt want to kill his officers?" Mrs. Bernardi asked querulously. "He's the commandant, isn't he? Or is he a professor? I never got that straight."

"He was one of the criminals on the ship," the vine told her. "What you might call a confidence man. This is about the only system in the Galaxy where he isn't wanted. He did tell you the truth, though, when he said they were sent on an expedition to collect zoological specimens. Dangerous work," it sighed, "and so his people use criminals for it. They were sent out in small detachments. Our friend here killed his guard in a fight over a female prisoner, which was why—"

"But what happened to the female prisoner?" Miss Anspacher's eye caught Dfar-Lll's. "Oh, no!" she gasped.

"Why not?" Dfar-Lll demanded. "I'm as much of a female as you are. Maybe even more."

The captain leaned close to Miss Anspacher. "No one can be more feminine than you are, Dolores," he whispered.

"But he—she's so young!" Mrs. Bernardi wailed.

The vine made an amused sound. "Don't you have juvenile delinquents on Earth?"

"Oh, what does all that matter now?" Jrann-Pttt said sullenly. "We're all going to a Sirian zoo, anyway."

"Correctly," approved the monster-bat. "Finest zoo. Clean. Commodious cages. Reasonable visiting hours. Very nice."

Mrs. Bernardi began to cry.

"Now," the vine comforted her, "a zoo's not so bad. After all, most of us spend our lives in cages of one kind or another, and without the basic security a zoo affords—"

"But we don't know we're in cages," Mrs. Bernardi sobbed. "That's the important thing."

Professor Bernardi looked at the vine. "But why are you—" he began, then halted. "Perhaps I don't want an answer," he said. There was no hope at all left in him, now that there was no doubt.

"You are wise," the vine agreed quietly. Algol arose from Mr. Bernardi's lap and rubbed against its thick pale green stem. He knew. The mosquito-bat looked at both of them restlessly.

The yellow haze had deepened to old gold. Now it was beginning to turn brown.

"It's twilight," Miss Anspacher

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observed. "Soon it will be dark."

"Perhaps we'll sail right past his ship in the night," Mortland suggested hopefully.

The mosquito-bat gave a snort. "Ship has lights. All modern convenients."

SUDDENLY the air seemed to have grown chilly — colder than it had any right to be on that torrid planet. All around them, it was dark and very quiet.

"I think I do see lights," Mortland said.

"Must be ship," Monster replied. And somehow the rest of them could sense the uneasiness in the thin, piping, alien voice. "Must be!"

"Your ship's a very large one then," Bernardi commented as they rounded a bend and a whole colony of varicolored pastel lights sprang up ahead of them.

"Not my ship!" the mosquito-bat exclaimed in a voice pierced with anguish. "Not my ship!"

Before them rose the fantastic, twisting, convoluting, turning spires of a tall, marvelous, glittering city.

"You will find that the streets actually are filled with chlorophyll," the vine said. "And I know you'll be happy here, all of you. You see, we can't have you going back to your planets now. No matter how good your intentions were, you'd destroy us. You do see that, don't you?"

"You may be right," Bernardi agreed dispiritedly, "although that doesn't cheer us any. But what will you do with us?"

"You'll be provided with living quarters comparable to those on your own planets," the vine told him, "and you'll give lectures just as if you were in a university—only you'll be much more secure. I assure you—" its voice was very gentle now — "you'll hardly know you're in a zoo."

—EVELYN E. SMITH

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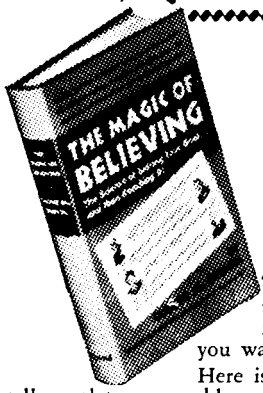

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